

# Wild

Australia's Wilderness Adventure Magazine

**Indian Himalaya:  
an untracked paradise**

**Heartbreak Spur**

**The Tarkine:  
Lassie's threatened walk**

**Ben Boyd's  
Light to Light Walk**

**People and passion:  
an epic paddle around  
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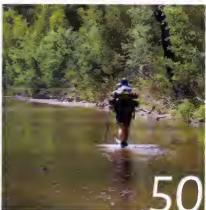
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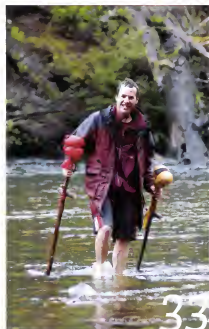
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**WARNING**

The activities covered in this magazine are dangerous. Undertaking them without proper training, experience, skill, regard to safety, and equipment could result in serious injury or death.



**Cover** Breakfast in bed: *John McLaine* contemplating the day to come near the Davey River in Tasmania's remote South-west.  
*John McLaine*

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# Black Saturday

## Life in the face of fire

IN EARLY 2006 BIG FIRES BURNT THROUGH the Grampians and I got the call from my parents: they wanted me to come up and help them protect the houses on their property on the western border of the national park. I drove up from Melbourne, pushing the speed limits, imagining the worst, then spent the next week waiting nervously with my folks.

During the week the character of the fire changed dramatically. One night my father and I drove out the back and parked on the hill looking out towards the south. The Asses Ears, a rocky peak behind my parents' property, was on fire and the sky was lit with a low red glow, the canopies of trees silhouetted against the flames. It was a balmy summer night and surreal. Sitting on the warm bonnet of the car, my Dad and I looked out and listened: from the forest came the constant sound of crashing limbs, conjuring up clouds of sparks in my imagination. It was strangely peaceful, and that night the fire seemed remarkably benign. We sat for a long time listening in silence.

A day or two later things changed: the wind picked up. Coming out of the back door I saw that a massive plume of smoke had erupted over the hill behind the house. It was spectacular and beautiful, but also awesome and terrifying, and it happened frighteningly fast. Climbing to the crest of the hill we watched the fire advancing towards us. We set about spraying down the houses, laying out hoses and preparing ourselves.

The fire eventually burnt about 400 metres into our property before the wind died down, but we got a taste of what it was like to have a fire front heading our way. Even with the local CFA on hand and extensive firebreaks, it was terrifying.

On Saturday 7 February my wife and I decided to drag our mattress into the living room, the only room in our house with air conditioning. I went to the local supermarket early that morning: already the sun was piercing and the strong wind was hot and dry. In our living room, only 40 or so kilometres from the fires, we watched DVDs all day, occasionally flicking across to the news. The day grew hotter and hotter—unimaginably hot. As I watched footage of a fire leaping up a hillside, I thought back to that day in 2006 and knew that there was no comparison between then and now.

But the true horror of what had happened wasn't fully communicated that day. It was only on Sunday that the extent of the fires—the dead and the thousands of homes burnt—began to be revealed. It felt odd to have spent all day in our living room, while only a short distance away people were dying in an inferno. Jenny Barnett, one of our Green Pages contributors and a fearless fighter for the environment, was one of these, caught in her house and dying with her husband (see *Obituary*, page 60).

In the aftermath of the fires, what seems clear is that Black Saturday was the 'perfect storm' of conditions: the combination of heat, wind and



The Wilsons Promontory fire, which started in February, heading towards Tidal River. Photo supplied by Parks Victoria

dry forests was unstoppable. A week or two after the fires, I watched the Four Corners special on Black Saturday. During the program, a CFA captain said that they were putting out spot fires 15 kilometres ahead of the fire front—he had never seen anything like it. The weather on the day was record-breaking and typifies the meteorological extremes that scientists say will become more common as our globe warms up. Terrifyingly, Black Saturday could be just a taste of our future.

The scientific consensus is that our planet is warming, that our land is becoming drier and more fire-prone, and that it is our lifestyle which has fuelled this change. Furthermore, some scientists think that the frequent burn-offs that have occurred since white settlement have actually made our forests more prone to large fires, rather than less. The truth is that the environment, our climate and their interaction are incredibly complex and we have only a partial knowledge of how everything works. Since the fires there have been calls for a massive increase in prescribed burns, but before we go rushing in, potentially sacrificing our wild places in the name of safety, we must understand the relationships involved.

In the aftermath of the fires the search for answers has already begun, as has the blame game. Environmentalists have been in the firing line, the accusation being that our obsession with maintaining wild places has jeopardised public safety. In particular, environmentalists' resistance to prescribed burning has sparked accusations of caring more for trees than for people. This accusation is not only offensive, but it also isn't based on reality. Environmentalists are humanists by definition: they care about wild places because they care about people. Rather than seeing nature as the enemy, they choose to see it as an essential part of what makes us human, and thus worthy of protection. Then there are the political, environmental and practical problems of burning off, which are particularly complicated in heavily populated bush areas such as those affected by the fires. The people in charge of prescribed burning are often damned if they do and damned if they don't.

The call for big increases in prescribed burning seems to be yet another case of nature having to make way for us, as if we haven't already imposed ourselves enough on the natural world. The opposite idea—that perhaps we should accommodate nature because we have so little of it—doesn't seem to have been considered.

Many people love to live in the bush so that they can be close to nature, but in doing so make themselves vulnerable. Paradoxically, if we want to make ourselves safer by clearing the bush, we destroy the thing we love. So what is the answer? If we want to live in these places we have to be prepared: prepared to evacuate, to fireproof our houses, to make bolt-holes and to sacrifice our homes if necessary. This is something that most people who live in the bush already know, so it seems to me that a more complex, comprehensive and far-reaching response than just blaming the greenies is required if we are going to reduce the threat of catastrophic fires.

Over time events like Black Saturday fade from collective memory, as does the realisation of nature's power. This is exacerbated by the fact that our modern, first-world existence insulates us from nature so effectively that we begin to believe that we are invulnerable.

One of my most vivid childhood memories is from 1983, shortly before Ash Wednesday: I was eight and my family had just moved to the Grampians. Massive clouds of smoke darkened the sky, blown over from a huge fire in the Adelaide Hills. My parents were told (wrongly) that our property was on fire and we began to evacuate into our old, long-wheel-based Land-cruiser. Mum told me to take only what was most important to me: I chose my pillow. Today we are faced with a similar decision: what is most important to us? Is it the environment? Our lifestyle? Our safety? Are these claims incompatible or can we find a way to have all three? Only the future will tell, but hopefully the Royal Commission into the fires will come up with some answers, and these answers will seriously consider the repercussions for the bush we love. 🐼

Ross Taylor  
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# In *defence* of peak bagging

The debate continues...

WHILE THERE ARE THOSE WHO ENJOY THE solitude of their own company in the bush, there are plenty of us who enjoy each other's company and like the challenge of navigating to a remote mountain top. From there we can see the wide view of past peaks conquered, of valleys walked and those yet to be explored: views from summits yet to be seen.

The Tasmanian bush is neither 'pristine' nor 'sacred' as Martin Hawes would have us believe. It has been burnt over thousands of years by Aboriginals and most severely in huge conflagrations over the 200 years since white settlement. In his excellent book *Burn*, Paul Collins documents some of the big fires, such as those that occurred in Tasmania in 1851 and 1967.

Despite walking in a landscape where vegetation is determined by fire tracks through it, there are unburnt pockets of rainforest and alpine flora, a delight to discover and see. Several large valleys in the Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park are either unburnt or rarely burnt, allowing walkers to enter a wonderful forest of mosses, lichens, ferns and tall, closed-canopy rainforest of myrtle and pine: the upper Mersey, Murchison and Eldon rivers, Pine Valley, and the gullies and valleys between the Loddon Range and Algonquin are particularly picturesque. Some of these areas are only viewed and explored by walkers en route to a remote peak. Note that most of these are in the central and western highlands, not the South-west.

Why go to the top of a peak one hasn't climbed before? For the view, the challenge, the feeling of depending on one's own resources with the aid of one's friends? As mountaineers say when asked why they climb a mountain: 'Because it is there.' These areas are not 'sacred' as Martin Hawes states: we are not nature worshippers, new pagans who have discarded more reality than the old pagans. The Aboriginals invested their country with spirits and deities, but burnt and slaughtered their way across it nevertheless, fighting the vegetation with fire, and animals and other Aboriginal tribes with spears and their bare hands. It was only their low numbers and ancient technology that prevented them from doing to the land what we white ferals have done.

Bushwalkers may be the new nomads, carrying their accommodation on their backs, going walk-about for the sake of it and finding new challenges and places to explore: escaping the oppression of modern civilisation briefly, and getting some fresh air, exercise and conversation. While Aboriginal bands apparently consisted of an average of 30 people (a most 'unholy' number according to Martin Hawes), bushwalking etiquette insists on a number between four (for safety) and a number not so large as to annoy others in the area. In areas no one visits, the upper limit is determined not by nature worshippers' views of their sacred places, but by the logistics of getting there and back.



"..They haven't put in the Duckboards yet, have they...?"

I do enjoy an occasional outing on my own for solitude and reflection, or to explore a new day walk, but not in the remote South-west on a multiday trip, knowing my wife would be at home worrying.

I also don't mind telling people in detail where I have been, in the hope that some might follow. Alas, while major tracks are very popular, fewer walkers are going off-track, even to easily accessible places, and the numbers going to remote peaks in the South-west are at a low ebb. The heyday of remote walking seems over. There are no hordes waiting to trample Martin's sacred wilderness (if only they could find out where it is). There are fewer younger walkers compared to a couple of decades ago and most of them don't want to go off the beaten track.

So I would hope stories of the wild would encourage future generations to take up the walking challenge and go in safe numbers to those remote destinations, climb the peaks and see the views available to the peak bagger.

Philip Dawson  
George Town, Tasmania

## Frenchmans Track

I wish that Dick Smith would leave Frenchmans Cap alone and not mess around with putting

duckboards in because he got a bit muddy (Wild no 10). Well, suck it up, Dick, because the attraction of Frenchmans is not only the awesome peak, but also the way you have to get there through the Sodden Loddons, which is an awesome experience. If you don't want to get muddy, then go up Mt Anne or the Sentinels. In Tassie we know that if you want a hell-trip you can rely on the Arthurs (the bit before Junction Creek) or Frenchmans (the Sodden Loddons). To have someone from the mainland come over and get upset that his shoes got muddy or, dare I say, [he got] mud on his clothes, is a clear sign to me that Dick is a sook, not a walker, and he gets away with it because he has money to splash around.

If Smith thinks that duckboarding and limiting the amount of people who can use the track are a good ideas, then someone should wipe the mud off his glasses and tell him thanks but no thanks. I love how the Frenchmans Cap track is now, not how it's going to be in the future.

Adam Harris  
Address not supplied

## Larapinta Trail review

I read with interest your excellent summer issue of Wild (no 11), but have a bone to pick with you



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IT'S BIG, IT'S COOL,  
IT'S WINTER 2009!

over the review of John and Monica Chapman's Larapinta Trail guide.

I agreed with your reviewer that the guide is excellent in its detail for people planning a walk. When I got a copy of the guide myself a couple of weeks ago, I was also very impressed that it came with an update page and an invitation to use the web site for further updates. Your reviewer's comment that the guide is already outdated is grossly unfair. Despite the effort that the Chapmans have made to provide necessary detail, it is inevitable that there will be a few errors and that changes will occur. This is covered by the update page and web site. It is good to see such a quality guide produced in Australia, and it is unfair that your reviewer dismisses it casually in this way.

I do not know the Chapmans nor do I have a financial interest in their business.

John McKinlay  
Eaglehawk, Victoria

## A question of gas

Your gear survey on lightweight stoves (Wild no 112) has some misconceptions about gas fuel types. Propane, isopropane and butane are all non-toxic, except when abused (i.e. directly inhaled forming an asphyxiation risk). Gas supplies for walking generally do not use straight propane as it has a much lower boiling point and requires a thicker walled (and heavier) cylinder for storage—the same sort you use for your barbeque.

Isobutane is not a mixture of butane and propane as claimed, it is a different isomer of butane which boils at  $-11^{\circ}\text{C}$  (compared to butane's boiling point of  $-0.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). Its lower boiling point makes it much more useful in subzero conditions as the fuel needs to boil (i.e. be a gas) before it can burn. Most high-quality gas stoves recommend or use a 20 per cent propane and 80 per cent isobutane mixture, which can be contained by a lightweight cylinder but will still burn in most conditions. (Temperatures below  $-11^{\circ}\text{C}$  result in just the propane from the cylinder burning off, leaving the heavier isobutane.) The action of the fuel boiling inside the cylinder cools the entire system down (you can usually feel this or see the condensation on the cylinder), so even though the temperature may be above the boiling point of the fuel, it can still sometimes be slow to burn when it is cold: warming up the fuel bottle near your body before using it helps, as does a burner with a fuel line that gets preheated. Straight butane gas cylinders are generally only useful in warm climates for this reason.

Victor Rajewski  
West Melbourne, Victoria

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# Three Capes development update

Janet Henderson from the Tasmanian National Parks Association (TNPA) reports

The official process for imposing the Tasmanian Government's proposed Three Capes Track—a commercial six-day, hut-based, tent-free walk—on the Tasman National Park continues to grind on. In February 2008 the draft changes to the Tasman National Park management plan, which must be approved before the Three Capes development can go ahead, were released for public comment. In January 2009 the public representations and the report from the Director of the Parks & Wildlife Service went to the Resource, Planning & Development Commis-

sion (RPDC). They can be viewed on the RPDC web site ([www.rpdc.tas.gov.au/plu/dmpreviews/tasman\\_national\\_park\\_and\\_reserves\\_draft\\_management\\_plan\\_2008](http://www.rpdc.tas.gov.au/plu/dmpreviews/tasman_national_park_and_reserves_draft_management_plan_2008)) and make interesting reading. Of the 237 respondents who addressed the Three Capes development, 209 (or 88 per cent) were opposed to it and only eight submissions gave unqualified support for the proposal.

The TNPA is running a postcard campaign asking the Minister for Parks not to approve the changes to the management plan. The card

points out that the developments would constitute '...the most intrusive, highly visible infrastructure project ever seen within an Australian national park (away from a road head)'. It outlines the major concerns about the project and also asks the minister to support the promotion and development of the existing Tasman Coastal Trail as an alternative, as well as the development of day walks.

The postcard and more information about the Three Capes development can be found on the TNPA web site: [www.tnpa.asn.au](http://www.tnpa.asn.au).

## Mountain running: the latest



Cathy Crompton leads a pack during the Lightning Strike 30 kilometre race near Canberra. John Harding

### John Harding reports

The 30 kilometre Lightning Strike run was created after fires in 2003 swept through Canberra's suburbs, destroying more than 500 houses, including that of champion marathon runner Robert de Castella. In the intervening years de Castella has been a leader in the recovery process, especially in the creation of Stromlo Forest Park on the lower slopes of Mt Stromlo. The park now boasts world-class mountain biking and cross-country running facilities and was the venue for the inaugural Stromlo Running Festival in February.

The Festival provided the opportunity for de Castella to realise a long-held dream for a bush-fire commemorative run from the Brindabellas to Canberra—the Lightning Strike.

Australia's top long-distance mountain runner, John Winsbury, relished the tough course and had a comfortable victory in 1 hour, 53 minutes, 54 seconds. Peter Johnson was second in 2 hours, 3 minutes, 39 seconds, and Ben Webster third in 2 hours, 7 minutes, 37 seconds. Nicole Butterfield was fastest female in 2 hours, 32 minutes, 10 seconds, followed by Symeko Jochinke in 2 hours, 35 minutes, 21 seconds, and Cathy Crompton in 2 hours, 37 minutes, 42 seconds.

The Six Foot Track race, from the Explorers Tree in Katoomba to Jenolan Caves, was held on 14 March. The 45 kilometre race was first held in 1984 with just seven starters and has grown in popularity to become Australia's most popular trail run. The course has a few quite steep ascents and descents, so requires a high stand-

ard of fitness to meet the seven hour cut-off time. In 2009 there were 849 starters and 817 finishers.

The 2009 race was held in cool, overcast conditions. Blue Mountains' triathlete Ben Artup took advantage of these to run 3 hours, 15 minutes, 25 seconds, several minutes better than the course record. Fellow Warrimoo runner Andrew Lee was second in 3 hours, 23 minutes, 58 seconds, and Turramurra's Alex Matthews third in 3 hours, 24 minutes, 54 seconds. Canberra's Vanessa Haverd and Jackie Fairweather ran personal bests of 3 hours, 58 minutes, and 4 hours, 2 minutes, 40 seconds, respectively, to be the fastest females, with Albury's Colleen Middleton finishing third in 4 hours, 3 minutes, 51 seconds.

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*\*Analogue 121.5 MHz distress beacons are no longer detected by satellite.*



# Scroggin

## Great Ocean Walk to be extended

In January the Victorian Government announced \$1.3 million in funding for extensions and additions to this scenic track. The walk currently runs between Apollo Bay and just east of the Twelve Apostles, but the new funding will allow ten kilometres of extra track to be added to the 104 kilometre walk, taking it all the way to the Twelve Apostles Visitor Centre. The funding will also include a new viewing platform for the Twelve Apostles and additional track signage, seats and boot-cleaning stations.

## Historic New South Wales huts reopened

O'Keefes and Brooks huts were destroyed in the 2003 fires that tore through Kosciuszko National Park. Both huts have now been rebuilt and were officially opened at the end of March. O'Keefes is located at the foot of Mt Jagungal and was originally built as a grazier's hut by Rod O'Keefe in 1933. Brooks Hut, which is located north of Mt Jagungal, is another grazier's hut, built by Bill Brooks and his business partner Harry Reid in 1944. Nineteen historic huts were burnt in the fires and a decision was made to rebuild seven of them. Broken Dam, Paton and Delays huts (in addition to O'Keefes and Brooks) have been successfully rebuilt so far. The huts were rebuilt by the National Parks & Wildlife

Service, Kosciuszko Huts Association and descendants of the huts' original builders.

## Mind Alpine Skyrun Ultra Marathon

One of Australia's toughest 'ultra runs', the Mind Alpine Skyrun Ultra Marathon, took place at the end of March. Held in Victoria's Alpine National Park, it follows a very tough 160 kilometre




Competitors in the Mind Alpine Skyrun Ultra Marathon silhouetted on the summit ridge of Mt Feathertop. Peter Mullins

course, which must be completed in under 48 hours. Starting at Harrietteville, it takes in the summits of Mt Feathertop, Mt Bogong, Mt Nelse and Mt Loch before returning to Harrietteville. The men's solo category was won by Paul Monk, who took out the race record in 33 hours, while the first woman to finish the course was Jessica Robson, who finished in 36 hours. The race raises

money for those suffering from mental illness; visit [www.mindaustalia.org.au](http://www.mindaustalia.org.au) to find out more.

## Winter Dreaming wins category in Italian film festival

Winter Dreaming: an Australian Alps freeheel film has won the telemark category of the 2009 Livigno Film Festival in Italy. Produced by Eucalypt Productions' director and producer Stephen Curtain, a former Wild staff member, the film captures the beauty and splendour of the Alps over three consecutive winters.

Winter Dreaming was awarded the honour in April by a jury consisting of TV sports journalist Elisa Calcamugli, Olympic freestyle skier Simone Galli, video expert Luca Genovesi, sports journalist Stefano Vegliani and mountain photographer Mark Shapiro. 

## Corrections and amplifications

The stove survey table in Wild no 112 (page 61) incorrectly lists the price of the Jetboil GCS stove as \$300; it should have been given as \$249.

Readers' contributions to this department, including high-resolution digital photos or colour slides, are welcome. Items of less than 200 words are more likely to be published. Send them to Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, VIC 3181 or email [editorial@wild.com.au](mailto:editorial@wild.com.au)

## Wild Diary

Wild Diary listings provide information about rucksack-sports events and instruction courses run by non-commercial organisations. Send items for publication to the Editor, Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, VIC 3181. Email [editorial@wild.com.au](mailto:editorial@wild.com.au)

### June

**Paddy Pallin 6 hr R**  
14 June, NSW  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Kathmandu Adventure Series M**  
20 June, NSW  
[www.maxadventure.com.au](http://www.maxadventure.com.au)

**6 hr including School Championships R**  
20–21 June, Vic  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**6 hr R**  
27 June, SA  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

### July

**Navshield BR**  
4 July, NSW  
[www.bwrs.org.au/pages/navshield.html](http://www.bwrs.org.au/pages/navshield.html)

**8 hr R**  
4 July, Qld  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Tough Bloke Challenge BR**  
4–5 July, NSW  
[www.toughblokechallenge.com.au](http://www.toughblokechallenge.com.au)

**24 hr Hayes Creek Rush R**  
11–12 July, NT  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**8 hr R**  
18 July, Vic  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Bush Capital Bush Marathon Festival BR**  
25 July, ACT  
[www.coolrunning.com.au](http://www.coolrunning.com.au)

**James Grant Memorial M**  
26 July, Qld  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**State Championships R**  
31 July–1 August, SA  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

### August

**Kathmandu Adventure Series M**  
1 August, NSW  
[www.maxadventure.com.au](http://www.maxadventure.com.au)

**8/24 hr State Championships and Interspersed R**  
1–2 August, ACT  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**24 hr State Championships R**  
1–2 August, Qld  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Snoogine R**  
8 August, Vic  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**24 hr State and School Championships R**  
8–9 August, WA  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Go Natural Multi Sport M**  
15 August, NSW  
[www.maxadventure.com.au](http://www.maxadventure.com.au)

**Lake Macquarie 6/12 hr R**  
15 August, NSW  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Kangaroo Hoppert S**  
29 August, Vic  
[www.hoppert.com.au](http://www.hoppert.com.au)

### September

**Night R**  
5 September, ACT  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**8 hr R**  
5 September, NT  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**8/24 hr and Victorian Championships R**  
5–6 September, Vic  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Quoll Adventuregain R**  
12–13 September, Qld  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**12/24 hr Kathmandu Adventure Series M**  
19–20 September, NSW  
[www.maxadventure.com.au](http://www.maxadventure.com.au)

### October

**12 hr R**  
3 October, WA  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**24 hr State Championships R**  
3–4 October, NSW  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**12 hr R**  
13 October, SA  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**OnaMission M**  
11 October, Qld  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Hells Bells M**  
17–18 October, Qld  
[www.gar.com.au](http://www.gar.com.au)

**6/12 hr Upside Down R**  
24–25 October, Vic  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**6/12 hr R**  
31 October, ACT  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

### November

**Upstream Challenge 30/50 km BR**  
7 November, Vic  
[www.upstreamfoundation.org](http://www.upstreamfoundation.org)

**Kathmandu Adventure Series M**  
14 November, NSW  
[www.maxadventure.com.au](http://www.maxadventure.com.au)

**3 hr Minigaine R**  
14 November, SA  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**6 hr R**  
21 November, WA  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**8/24 hr State Championships R**  
28–29 November, Tas  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Activities:** BR bush running, M multiports, R rogaining, S skiing. **Rogaining events** are organised by the State rogaining associations

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# Sticks & Stones

What should we take from nature? Quentin Chester puts his back into the question

IT CAME OUT OF NOWHERE. I WOKE, SHUFFLED out of bed to the window and innocently leant across to open the blinds. The moment I lifted my arm, my back swayed, then juddered as if a spear had been driven into the base of my spine. The pain was astonishing: the kind that makes grown men yelp and their eyes scrunch shut. I made it only as far as the living room before crumpling to the floor. In the hour or so I lay there before trying to move there was time to mull over what had happened. Time enough to imagine that maybe this was karma.

Twenty-four hours earlier I had been walking a remote stretch of coast where steep gullies drop suddenly to the shore. Headlands and ribs of dark rock framed each of these openings. Some of the beaches below formed smooth curves of sand backed by scrubby ravines. Others were all rock, with steep ledges of shingle. It was a calm, humid day and in the soft predawn light the damp air had the vegetal aroma of old grass salted with spray from incoming waves. The shore was so remote as to feel abandoned and the coves loomed as grand versions of the inlets I spent a lot of my boyhood mucking around in.

There had been nearly a week of these sorties, dropping into the valleys to dodge waves and clunk along pebble beaches. Officially, this was 'work'. Yet, as rushed and long as the days were, they still created a twinge of guilty pleasure, the kind that people generally keep to themselves. For anyone whose interests are skewed to nature, to be let loose in the bush is like going on a bender. Despite tiredness and the odd ache during that final morning on the coast, I was still on a high. Then I made the mistake of wondering what I'd have to show for all these days away.

Our dining area at home has become a place of treasures. Not ornaments or paintings, but glass-fronted boxes that house assorted insects and butterflies. Anyone who finds the sight of impaled invertebrates off-putting can gaze at shells, stones and bits of driftwood on the window sills. These are incidental objects, stray gifts from children and friends, and things that have appeared before us in all sorts of out-of-the-way places. Some items caught the eye because of their odd shapes or imagined resemblance to creatures or things. Others just had a texture or colour pattern that charmed us.

Several of these keepsakes come from travels my wife Dale and I have made together. Just as many, however, are presents I've ferried home from work visits to a far-flung island or corner of the outback. Some blokes give their wives flowers or perfume. If she's lucky, my beloved might get a shell or a pelican feather. Once, I managed to get a paper-thin nautilus shell wrapped inside my day pack all the way from Tassie's Three Hummock Island back to Adelaide—but only as far as the airport. Before I could retrieve it from the plane's overhead locker, some business type accidentally smashed it with his briefcase.



Objects of desire and retribution: rocks on the south coast of South Australia. *Quentin Chester*

As a result, for a long time my peace offerings were small stones. Thankfully, Dale has an exceptional regard for anything discovered in nature, so even a moderately interesting pebble generally did the trick. Such gifts were also shameless attempts to ease the pangs of discomfort I felt for swanning around places I knew she would enjoy at least as much as I did. After a few years, however, this routine began to seem a bit old hat, as if I was just another pleading Adelie penguin saying: 'Here's a small stone for you.'

That is why, when the sun finally broke through the lid of cloud and lit up the shingle

along the beach on that last morning, ambition got ahead of me. In the drowsy heat of the moment, the long bank of grey and black stones seemed utterly irresistible. From a distance it was just a jumbled heap of rocks. Up close, however, the stones possessed the burnished character of precious artefacts. For thousands of years, as the waves kept coming, these stones endured the bump and grind of their neighbours. Like prized memories, every stone had the reassuring look of something that reveals the polish of time, and yet remains resilient and enduring.

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There wasn't a plan, as such, to collect anything. Nevertheless, in the throes of walking along such a beach you can be distracted. Staring down, your gaze is constantly discerning shapes and relations. The effect is rhythmic, releasing and hypnotic. Often there is a single stone, like a face in the crowd, that catches the eye. You might walk on for a while and then double back to the stone for a second or third look. As crazy as it sounds, if we're attentive there are objects that appear to approach us by means of their form or essence, as if they have a manner of speaking to our intuition. As Dale says of the things that 'find' her: 'They have to call my name.'

Among the thousands of glossy, ovoid stones on the beach that morning, there was one strange individual I kept returning to. Shaped like a bâtarde loaf, it had a slight taper at one end and a mouth-like crease just north of its midpoint. Jet black, silky smooth and incredibly solid, it was handsome enough just lying flat. When stood on its squat end it became something else again, an adamant object as suggestive as an African tribal mask or a glowing Brancusi sculpture. Then there was a hill to climb and the lump of rock in question must have weighed nearly 15 kilograms, the sensible option was to leave it in situ. But for me it wasn't exactly a sensible morning and, after a few moments staring at this new-found totem, I hunched over and levered it into my day pack.

These days the business of claiming things from the environment is a touchy subject. The dictum 'Take only photographs, leave only footprints' has become embedded in almost every park brochure and bushwalking handbook. You can't argue with a code of behaviour aimed at protecting the integrity and vigour of wild places. Given the way we've messed with so much country, 'minimum impact' starts to look like the only credible approach for enjoying what little we have left.

That's certainly true for national parks, where codes of conduct are promoted and occasionally enforced. Beyond their confines, however, the reality is more blurred. In the face of the way people live and the creatures we are, to try to apply the same strictures to every scenario seems impractical. Our species has a long history of messing with nature. We enjoy the rough and tumble of making our own way. In various fashions we hunt and gather, share campfires and find shelter. Along the way, stuff is used and removed. Timber is torched. Specimens are gathered. People hunt down gems. Kids collect tadpoles. And some of us occasionally happen upon stones that serve as talismans.

Chesil Beach is on the Dorset coast in the south of England. Nearly 29 kilometres long, 200 metres wide and 14 metres above sea level, it tethers the island of Portland to the mainland at West Bay. The beach is composed almost entirely of pebbles—hundreds of billions of the little blighters. In early 2007 the writer Ian McEwan happened to mention in a BBC radio interview that he had a handful of these rocks on his desk while writing his novel *On Chesil Beach*. Seizing on this, the tabloid media and a few conservationists savaged McEwan for plundering the beach, which is now a protected site. He duly arranged for the stones to be returned. 'I was not aware of having committed a crime', he said somewhat roguishly, before

playing a straight bat: 'Chesil Beach is beautiful and I'm delighted to return the shingle to it.'

As I trudged up the hill back to the car, the possibility that I might have similarly transgressed was the last thing on my mind. Chesil Beach was 17,000 kilometres away and, as far as I knew, my beach wasn't 'protected'. Not only that, but on taking a rest halfway up the hill I'd discovered the lid pocket of my day pack was undone. In my fugue state I couldn't remember whether I'd left the car keys under the driver's seat or in the now empty day pack pocket. The idea of searching a kilometre of beach shingle for lost keys was too much to bear. Anxious to be put out of my misery, I accelerated into the final 200 metres. As I bent over to drive the day pack's weight forward, the pointed mass of the rock pressed on my spine like a bully's elbow.

I don't go bush to collect rocks, or anything else for that matter. I don't take stuff from national parks. It's not about acquisition, having one of everything or showing off. In fact, the few items we have at home from years of going bush wouldn't even fill a laundry bucket. Leaving places as I find them is generally how it goes. The thing is, from time to time I just stumble across an odd shard in nature that captures a place and a moment—a fragment that also opens up a shared, wordless way of knowing and feeling.

To my great relief, the keys were under the driver's seat. Driving away with the windows down, I gulped the gusts of cool, damp air streaming through the car. The morning was still ocean fresh and eucalyptus-scented. It felt like happy hour. My work was complete and it was time to return home and deliver a gift.

Little did I know then that the damage was done. Or that I would spend the next couple of days on my back, barely able to move, my head filled with images of that shingle beach and the light slanting on to the dark, gleaming stones. The new rock was well-received and much admired. Nevertheless, it was hard not to take the injury as a sign that I'd crossed some kind of line and that this grander offering was out of keeping with the other objects on our window sills. Also, after a day at home the rock lost its black sheen and dulled to a pale shade of grey. So as I lay there and the hours passed, a plan formed to get well and revisit the coast with Dale. Together we would return our stone to the wash of the waves.

Call me old-fashioned, but I don't want to end up in a land where the only way to appreciate nature is at arm's length, from behind an ethical line. Call me what you will. Names can't harm me. No, what would really hurt is not having a waterhole to bomb into, or a place to build a campfire, nor anywhere you're allowed to pick a flower or gather a shell. Nor, for that matter, a lonely beach where people can learn for themselves that sticks and stones stress the bones, and that some treasures might even shine brighter when they go back to where they were found. ☹

*A Wild contributor since issue no 3, Quentin Chester is a freelance journalist and the author of six books about wilderness places. His preferred habitats include isolated corners of the outback and northern Australia, offshore islands and obscure gorges in the Flinders Ranges. His latest book is *Tales from the Bush* and his web blog is at: <http://quentinchester.blogspot.com>*



# Wild Himal

**Tim Macartney-Snape explores untracked areas of the Indian Himalaya**

VISITING POPULAR PARTS OF THE HIMALAYA CAN STILL BE A WONDERFUL experience for the first-timer, but I have long since tired of trekking and climbing in the popular Himalayan destinations. These places have developed to a point where the local economy and culture are highly geared to tourism. This is an understandable occurrence given the standard of living there, but with that development comes a diminishment in the authenticity of the experience and the loss of an earlier, more pristine feeling. Litter, erosion, the proliferation of shops and lodges and, of course, hordes of people all contribute to this. Modern culture and its values are inevitably embedded in those of us who travel and if we do so in crowds we unwittingly turn the truly exotic into the banal. Nowhere is this more notable than on Everest itself.

Fortunately, the popular destinations in the Himalaya are mainly limited to the valleys that lead to the bases of the fourteen 8000 metre peaks. This leaves the majority of the region relatively untouched and open to exploration by those with an adventurous spirit. There is nothing quite like the feeling of treading ground untrammelled by crowds or like the excitement of uncertainty—the agreeable tension derived from seeking a path through country that may in the end thwart your efforts and force you somewhere quite different. To experience this in the Himalaya, all that is needed is imagination, perseverance, politeness (with locals) and an ability to read the country, a facility that gets easier with experience. Of course it can and should be done in a sustainable way by embracing the principles of 'leave no trace'.

It was in this spirit, in search of somewhere untouched, that I stood at the end of the road at the Indian hill village of Munsiri, looking eastwards towards a little basin of snow shimmering in the heat of a spring morning. Elegant 5000 to 6000 metre peaks—the southern outliers of the

taller Panch Chuli range to their north-west—ringed the basin. The valley that drained the basin's glaciers lay behind two sharp ridges. The main question in my mind was whether it was possible for our party to negotiate the upper part of the hidden valley. The ridges on either side looked precipitous and it seemed unlikely that they would yield any walkable route. With me were 12 people who had signed up to join my trek, my partner and co-leader Stace, a three-person Nepali catering crew and about 30 local Kumaoni porters and their overseers. I had led them to expect a good deal of exploration and, I hoped, some elementary mountaineering. All trusted that I had a clear plan in my mind about what we would be doing for the next three weeks. Although I knew what I'd like us to do, I had no detailed idea how that could be turned into a reality. I was only able to tell our local helpers that, all going well, we would eventually reach the road head in the Dhauliganga valley, some 60 kilometres to the east, after finding our way on a day-by-day basis.

A common source of exasperation when walking in the Himalaya is having to start a walk that will end somewhere higher by first descending a long way. Unfortunately, we had to drop down to cross a river to climb the ridge on the other side, so that we could again drop down to cross another river on the other side of that, so that we could climb over the even higher ridge beyond that to drop down to the river that might finally lead us to my desired destination—or to a dead end. As we wound our way down it got hotter and hotter, until at the bottom of the valley the air was stifling. It was summer already down there, heavy with heat and humidity, and full of noise—the roar of rapids overlaid by the throbbing beat of cicadas. On a bluff overhanging the river a troupe of rhesus monkeys clambered around in the shade, apparently unfazed by their exposure to the swirling rapids. Only on the swaying suspension bridge



# aya

was the heat temporarily wafted away by the river's own glacial water-cooled breeze.

As we began the long grind up the other side, I looked at those of my companions who were experiencing the Himalaya for the first time and wondered what they were feeling. In doing so, I took myself back 25 years to my own first experience, only a few valleys to the west, on our approach to climb Dunagiri, one of the 7000 metre peaks ringing the Nanda Devi sanctuary. For an Australian, the scale and verticality of the Himalaya is mind-boggling, and the exotic feeling is added to by the local people, who are predominantly of agrarian Hindu castes in the lower to middle hills, then herder/farmers of Tibeto-Burman stock higher up. Then there is the climate, almost tropical lower down and progressing through all the earth's climatic zones to the permanent snowline—often within a day's hard walk. Finally, the variety and rapid transition of vegetation adds to the exciting feeling of being somewhere very different. There is the promise of a surprise around every corner and over every ridgetop.

I was feeling relieved to be under way with enough porters to carry our supplies but, as always on exploratory trips, I was anxious about the route ahead and beginning to worry whether we would find a pleasant camp by day's end. Finding level space to fit ten tents is never easy in vertiginous country, but scouting around with energy and a discerning eye usually yields a suitable spot not far from water.

The heat of the midday sun resulted in billowing thunderheads and we were treated to a cooling deluge that cleared before our long uphill trudge brought us to some terraces lying fallow with grass. An enquiry at the nearest farmhouse yielded the usual generous invitation to make ourselves at home. Such hospitality should always be



accepted with the counter offer of purchasing surplus food from the landowner or paying a small fee. By contrast, in popular trekking areas, available camping places are invariably charged for and fiercely fought over by groups competing for space, even though they are usually soiled and dusty.

Though we were embarking on what by any measure would be classed as a challenging walk, there were some in our group who had never pitched a proper tent in their lives so, when the tent porters turned up, I held a tent-pitching class. Well-pitched and well-looked-after tents in good condition make life more comfortable in the mountains, so it is always worth going over the main points of tent pitching and etiquette. When all had their homes in order we retired to the larger mess tent for afternoon

Looking down into the gorge of the Gori Ganga after an afternoon storm from our first camp. *Left*, celebrating on a high foothill near the road head town of Munsiari; the highest peak wholly within India, Nandi Devi (7816 metres), rises beyond the peak of Nanda Kat.

*All photos by the author*







tea. Now the walk was under way, everyone's anxieties had begun to fall away.

Two minor passes, one major bridge-building exercise and three days later, we were working our way up from the last village in the valley of the Paina River. There we had hired a local *askari* (hunter) who assured us there was a tenuous route up the valley. It is the norm in the Himalaya for the country between village and snowline to be crisscrossed with paths made by local people going to and fro in their herding and foraging activities; only prohibitively steep terrain is devoid of paths. Soon we began to discover that this valley was just such a place. Our guide became increasingly uncertain about the way ahead, and doubt began to spread through the group. Our discontinuous paths were mere traces of animal tracks, the forested bits presented full-on bush bashing, and what clear stretches there were made you very mindful of each step because the slope dropped away very steeply to the cliff-lined torrent far below. It was as wild a place as I had ever been in the Himalaya, and in the dense thickets and forest glades I began to see plants I'd never seen before. This is always a good indicator of the absence of grazing by domestic sheep and goats and, as in most places, added a true feeling of wildness. Helping my companions to appreciate this was one way I hoped would counter the shock of such rugged terrain.

We fought all day, weaving deviously around the steepest bluffs, sometimes sliding down gullies, virtually abseiling on strands of slender mountain bamboo but always climbing more than descending. Late in the afternoon, we seemed to reach an impasse. The way ahead appeared blocked by steep grassy slabs, with no trees to hang on to or brace a foot against, only slippery grass on sloping ledges. These all seemed passable until you ventured out, only to discover that the slope and exposure were too formidable. Situations such as this require a fine balance between perseverance and knowing when to give up. The trouble was, giving up here was uninviting: the last flat place was at least six hours behind us and darkness was approaching. Eventually I found a rising traverse that led to a hidden gully of willows. Despite the nearly vertical angle, the thickness of the willows made it feasible to climb down

spirits. The porters began picking the leaves of a large, leafy plant said to taste like a hot mustard green. Seeing there was no shortage of it around, I asked our cook if we might not try a small sampler for dinner. Our tents went up among the boulders and I did my best to lift the dampened enthusiasm of the group by telling them we were among only a handful of people who had ever set foot in this place and that, most probably, in the next few days we would step into completely virgin territory. From what I'd seen, however, our prospects of doing that were rather doubtful.

I declared an acclimatisation 'rest day', during which we would find an accessible snowdrift on the valley side for some basic mountaineering instruction. I was hoping this might also be a good chance to look for a safe breach in the cul-de-sac on to the *révé* of the snow basin above. The next day we went slightly down the valley from the cirque we'd camped in and up the only slope that was obviously safe. A thousand metres

*Though I tried hard not to show it, I was a bit worried about what lay ahead—what if, after all the hard work, we were turned back before getting high enough for a good view? Had I led them into a cul-de-sac?*



without much fear of falling far. Below, the gully spilled into a less steep watercourse that in the evening gloom led through thick forest and jumbled, moss-covered boulders to the river itself. The river's cliff-lined banks were now downstream, and here the valley floor was a flat bed of gravel left behind by the valley's ice-age glacier. Physically and emotionally it had been a hard day. The whole group, including the porters, had done a commendable job in getting there and I was very grateful for their faith that we would find a way through.

Though I tried hard not to show it, I was a bit worried about what lay ahead—what if, after all the hard work, we were turned back before getting high enough for a good view? Had I led them into a cul-de-sac?

A more straightforward day along the valley floor, with much clambering around obstacles such as boulders, avalanche debris and rhododendron thickets, brought us to a steep-walled cirque at the head of the valley. Rain fell intermittently; all around us, cliffs rose to meet the cloud. Breaks in the cliff were filled with tumbling seracs. Cones of dirty avalanche debris sat at the foot of every gully. It looked like the cul-de-sac I had feared and the chill in the damp air did nothing to lift our

up we finally came upon enough snow on which to practise cramponing, self-arresting and roping together—very necessary skills to have if we should be lucky enough to get up into the basin on the other side. Before the usual late morning cloud-build-up I had a good opportunity to scout for possible routes.

I suffer from being eternally optimistic about the way ahead, a trait which has occasionally led me into difficulty. Despite reminding myself of this, I thought I could make out a tantalising possibility. That afternoon, after seeing everyone safely back in camp and drinking several cups of tea, I went up to have a look.

Route finding is a core aspect of mountaineering. In its purest form it involves finding the most direct line possible to the summit. Here I had to find the easiest route—arguably a more

*From far left to right, climbing out of the Paina Valley after it ended abruptly in a cirque fed by hanging glaciers. It felt a privilege to be passing through what felt like virgin forest in the Paina Valley. Crossing the Madkani River, it rose ten centimetres while we were building the bridge. Tea stop in a 'dhabba', complete with samosas for a snack.*

difficult puzzle to piece together, but a game I find very satisfying because it requires imagination and a willingness to go out on a limb. Openness to any subtle hunch tentatively emerging from the suppressed recesses of one's mind is always helpful. Sometimes a hunch will indicate danger, but on this occasion everything I felt was positive. In a couple of hours I was on top



Climbing to the rim of the Rulla glacier basin gave everyone a lesson in the basics of alpine climbing.

and on the threshold of an icy world of glaciers and perpetual snow. What makes the southerly ramparts of the Himalaya so exciting is the rapid transition from verdant forest to permanent snow. I couldn't see much ahead of me because of the mist, but there was enough to let me think that further exploration would yield more than one way forward.

And so it did. We spent the next week exploring the basin. From two high camps we explored three easy, progressively higher peaks, reveling in views that stretched from the mountains of central Garhwal to those of western Nepal and Tibet—Dunagiri, Changabang, Trisul, Hardeol, Nanda Devi, the Panch Chulis, Api, Nampa and Guria Mandata, to name the more prominent. Though we were relatively low by Himalayan standards, we felt much higher because to the south and west the terrain dropped to the forested ridges and valleys of the higher foothills. As it was the end of spring we also had some cracking thunderstorms, which added an extra dimension to the overall atmosphere.

Big mountains have to be the most dynamic of terrestrial environments. Change is constant and rapid: avalanches, collapsing seracs, melt water, hoarfrost, snowflakes, snow-pellets, frozen crust, waist-deep snow like porridge, silence, calmness and violent storms. Our basin was ringed by peaks ranging from 5300 to 6100 metres, which made for a more friendly feel. There were no giant, menacing walls to calve off the massive avalanches that can occur on bigger mountains. The modest size of these peaks was the main reason they had never been visited before. There must be scores of such places along the Himalayan chain.

Since we still had to cover more than half the distance to the planned end of our trek, we bade farewell to our lovely basin. Not wanting to back-track all the way down the Paina valley, and in the hope of joining a major trading route that would speed us eastward over the remaining three passes to our destination in the Dhauliganga valley, I decided to risk a rising traverse out of the eastern rim of the valley. This looked feasible on our only map, which—with a contour interval of 100 metres and a scale of 1:150 000—gave plenty of latitude for wishful thinking. Happily, in this case it resulted in an excellent adventure over spectacular if exciting terrain, and through beautiful forest, that after two days led us to a well-made track. Though we were still a solid day's walk into the mountains from the nearest village, it was a culture shock to re-emerge into a landscape modified by humans and their flocks. Centuries of grazing and burning had left their mark. Only the steeper ground held forest, and that of that was the hardy and opportunistic rhododendron with a few old stands of fire-scarred fir trees. Broad tongues of meadow swept down into the valleys from the craggy ridges. It was beautiful, but no longer wild.

With the worry of route finding behind us and the ease of a well-beaten path to follow,

The jeep track was hewn out of the solid gneiss of the gorge. Just below it was the river, an unrelenting, heaving, foaming, roaring, brown torrent of power that held me mesmerised. My mind plotted a paddling route, which ended abruptly in a waterfall that plunged into a boat-destroying cauldron of rock and white foam. (At the time of writing I read that sections of the river had just been paddled by a group of extreme kayakers from New Zealand and the United Kingdom.) We walked on down the road; the usual afternoon rain grew gradually heavier until we came to a squalid and muddy town that was obviously the current 'end of the line' for bus services.

Eventually a bus came whose driver agreed to charter his services to take us down the valley. Chartering the bus did not mean that the driver didn't stop for anyone else who wanted a lift along the way; he did. Soon there was no standing room left, but still people clung to the outside. The single-lane road was slippery and as the bus lurched along it was hard not to think of the river.

After an hour or so we rounded a bend to be greeted with a vision of Armageddon. As such valleys are wont to do, the gorge had opened out a little. Normally this would be the site of a village and probably it once had been, but now there was what looked like a vast quarry, seething with activity. Along the bottom sprawled a shanty town, with the smoke of a thousand fireplaces oozing through the debris-clad roofs. Further on, large iron sheds sprouted broken-down bits of earth-moving machinery, rock crushers and cement-mixing paraphernalia. Finally, the apparent focus of this apocalyptic scene: across the enclosing sides of the gorge rose a wall of rock and concrete that made individual workers and their machines look like ants. For all its ferocity and frightening power, the swollen torrent of the Dhauliganga had been turned hard right into a tunnel that disappeared into the side of the gorge. Meanwhile the 'road' had become a quagmire and our bus slewed to a halt. The bus driver sounded that most vital of all Indian highway accessories, the horn, and along came a giant front-end loader. Deftly its driver put the bucket against the back of the bus—there must have been some solid connection to the chassis—and pushed us through the remaining mess to the end of the construction zone.

Beyond the hydroelectric dam site, the gorge closed in again and the road resumed its narrow, tortuous path, cleaved out of the mountain-side, leaving us wondering about the surreal scene we had just witnessed. It was hard to imagine how all that giant machinery could have been broken down into small enough components to be hauled up this narrow road. We had been jolted from a timeless land into the 21st century; from a wilderness that in its higher parts had never before been trodden by human feet into an ambitious outpost of an up-and-coming giant of the global economy. India has always been a land of extremes. That it will continue to be is partly because two-thirds of the world's greatest mountain range falls within its borders. 📍



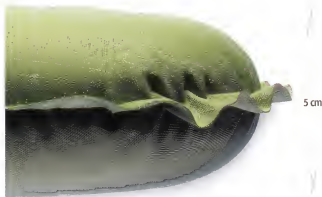
the days took on a more relaxed and predictable tone. Often we would finish a day's five- to six-hour walk before lunch, leaving the afternoon for a nap, reading and a game of cricket. Though they were barely literate, our porters had a good knowledge of the game, and there was never any trouble rustling up a team. India often defeated Australia. We gave up using an ice axe for a bat when one slipped from the hands of an over-enthusiastic batsman and bounced off a porter's head. Three stitches closed the resultant wound and he went back to play!

Early on the last day we came to our first village and not long after that—with quivering knees from our unending downward plunge into the gorge of the Dhauliganga—we finally walked on to the end of a road, a remarkable and incongruous sight in that setting.

Tim Macartney-Snape finds his occasional exploratory treks to sensitive altitudes a 'helpful' means of keeping his mountaineering addiction within 'responsible' bounds. He fully admits to aiding and abetting the habit in others.



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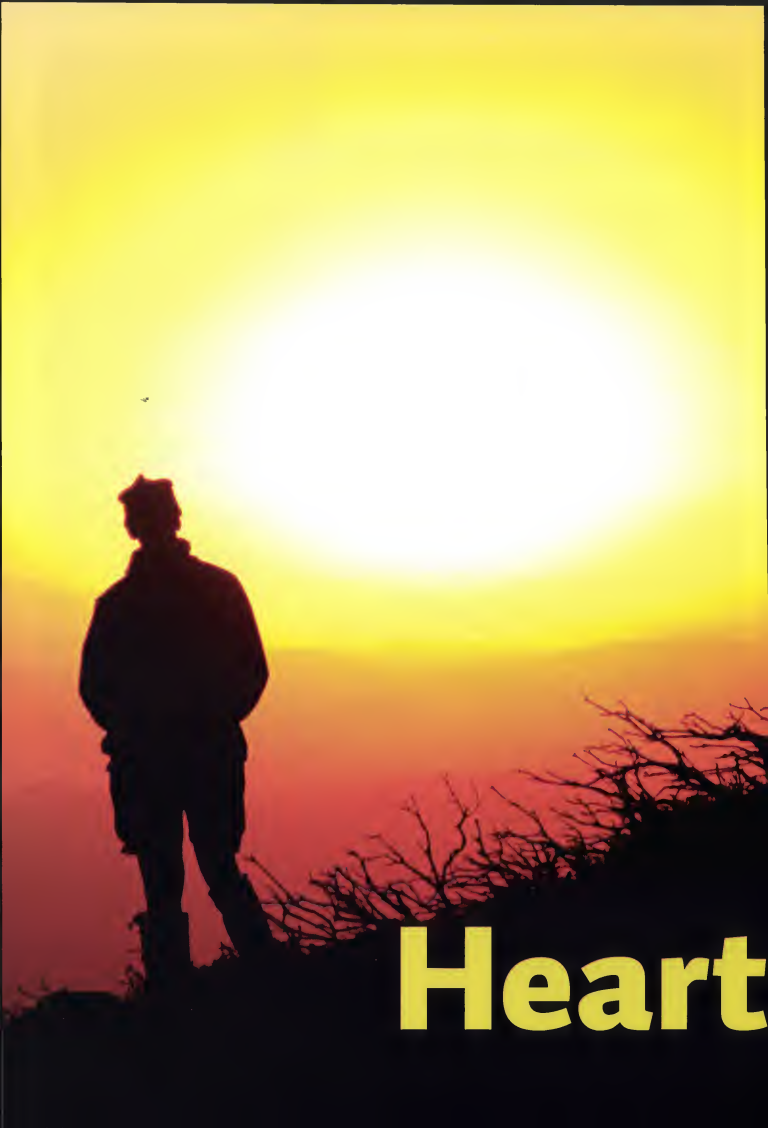
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Home, work, mortgage, children, sickness, in-laws, outlaws: 14 years later the pile of laundry on top of the things that attracted us to each other had grown so high we wondered what they had been in the first place. I found myself staring at this person in my life and wondering how he ever got there.

The route from this point could be messy, to say the least. I could either watch this stranger in my life and hope for the best, or I could be proactive and try to remember what it was we had once seen in each other. This option was also fraught with pitfalls: there was every chance I might not like him. Or we both could have changed so much that we never stood a chance, in which case pulling the washing off the pile would be a painful process. Either way we had to move forward: if that meant the washing needed an immediate laundering, then we just had to pull out the Omo. (Or maybe an industrial strength bleach—pick your personal poison!)

Perhaps you are one of those smart breeds of partner who intuitively recognises the need to keep the home fires burning when it comes to matters of the heart. We thought we were paid-up members of that

group, but we weren't—we'd allowed the moss to grow unchecked—and it bit us hard when it all came unravelling.

Where do you start? How far back do you need to go? Maybe it would be just as easy to forget the whole thing and continue as before in that ever-tightening circle of the mundane, while that pile of rank laundry grows on the organism you refer to as your relationship.

Instead we took to the mountains; back to our very roots. He may have found my smile and gregarious nature enchanting but did it still cut it after two children and 14 years? We had walked together in the interim but no other trip was as important as this one.

We sublet the kids to a friend for four days and decided on a walk. We'd do a loop from Mt Hotham across the Razorback to Mt Feathertop, down the Diamantina Spur to the West Kiewa River. Then up the spur to the Westons Hut site and across the Australian Alps Walking Track (AAWT), with a side trip to Youngs Hut. We'd

**Judy Clayton learns a life lesson while climbing the Diamantina Spur in the Victorian High Country**



**Far left, watching the sun set from Mt Little Feathertop.**

*Scott Haskins*

**Left, Rob and Judy Clayton at Dibbins Hut, before the explosion.**

*All uncredited photos by the author*

# break Spur

## Terrible trekking *tanties*

### The abominable snowman

Six hours immersed in Kathmandu's chaotic melee of madness and mayhem triggered his first Nepalese tantrum: the hot water in our budget hotel room was cold, sleeping bags were laid over disturbingly hairy sheets, and the local hawkers who hounded us that first night simply sniggered as my boyfriend vented his fury in the street. When we finally hit the track to Everest Base Camp after a week of cancelled mountain flights, there were sore knees, blistered feet, rat attacks and a spectacular hissy fit that sounded the death knell for our already rocky relationship.

The misery began with a bottleneck of trekkers we couldn't overtake, a fall along a muddy track, and my return to retrieve a forgotten camera while my boyfriend waited in the cold, working himself into a deep gloom. After a final two-hour trudge through deep snow, we flung open the door of a cosy mountain guest house to find a group of trekkers silently sipping tea. Rushing into the tiny room, my boyfriend skimmed the red-hot chimney, melting his expensive down jacket and unleashing an explosive snowstorm of feathers and expletives.

Shocked trekkers looked on, shielding their tea from the deluge of feathers, as my boyfriend raged wildly. Only my stern words settled the situation, but our impressive entrance was one of our last.

Catherine Lawson

### Happily ever after

The highest ascent of the Ironbound Range on Tasmania's South Coast Track is one of the most gruelling climbs on any walk in Australia, requiring a 900 metre gain in altitude over a distance of only three kilometres. Its difficulty is often compounded by steadily falling temperatures and intensifying wind and rain. Most of the people who walk the track fly in to Port Davey and reach the start of the Ironbounds ascent after about a day-and-a-half—long enough to loosen the joints but not to shed those extra Christmas pounds. So the South Coast is not necessarily the best place to take, for example, a fiancée who is new to bushwalking...

In the mid-1980s I spent several weeks doing track work on the crest of the Ironbounds and met many of the walkers who came through that summer. One morning my colleague and I were working in a pall of fog when we heard a stream of high-pitched invective emerging out of the gloom. Although we couldn't catch the words, it was clear that the woman was very unhappy and was taking it out on a companion who was either lost for words or had the good sense not to interject.

The volume of the poor woman's tirade increased for several minutes until suddenly she came into view, whereupon she looked mortified and we all tried to pretend that nothing had been heard or said. A minute or two later her hapless escort also went by, looking decidedly sheepish and browbeaten.

In fairness to the fairer sex, I admit that I've 'lost it' myself many times over the years, especially in thick scrub. But I've had no one to blame but myself.

Martin Hawes

### The stranger

A few years back some friends and I had spent a clear winter's morning scrambling up to the crest of Mt Hack. This lonely peak stands on the brink of the northern Flinders Ranges. The views in all directions are outstanding, especially the lost world of pine-filled valleys to the north. There were half a dozen of us lazing about on the rocks on top, eating, joking and generally hooting and carrying on with the casual, floaty euphoria that walkers are prone to on summits. Then, out of nowhere, a lone figure approached from the other side of the ridge. He looked extremely serious and was dressed to the nines with full walking gear, a huge pack and a map case around his neck. 'What are you doing here?' he barked. The sternness of the question caught everyone in our party off guard. There was an awkward pause when we looked at one another with smiles fixed and eyebrows rising. Finally, one of us mumbled something about going for a day trip. Our visitor was not impressed. He was clearly on a mission—perhaps he saw us as irresponsible lightweights, or maybe it was just our frivolity that annoyed him. We'll never know because he suddenly walked off, heading north. As he left he shouted back at us: 'Well, I hope you've got a map and know how to use it.'

Quentin Chester

### The skinny-dippers

We were descending a steep hill to a swimming hole in the Grampians when I saw that our pool was already occupied. Despite the distance and my bad eyesight, I could make out a couple skinny-dipping. There were a lot of us and we had come a long way, so we continued down the hill, making plenty of noise so that they would hear us coming and make themselves decent.

They didn't. Instead, they lounged on the other side of the pool, still naked, glaring at us. I was happy that I had to remove my glasses to swim as they weren't the shapeliest couple.

Finally the man swam across the pool and confronted us. He told us in no uncertain terms where we needed to go, various limbs flapping in the air to illustrate his point. I noted that despite the hot day, the water was cold. We were amused but also young and slightly appalled, so we decided to find a smaller pool downstream and began to depart. With his rant, the man waded back into the water, as he did his feet slipped on a slimy rock shelf. Backwards he went, awkwardly falling on his broad white arse, cutting it. Glancing back as I left, my last view was of the man clutching his bleeding behind, retreating across the pool with the last shreds of his dignity in tatters.

Ross Taylor

complete the route by heading down to Dibbins Hut, up Swindlers Spur via Derrick Hut, and back to the lake at Mt Hotham.

At least that is what I thought was happening. It turns out that we hadn't even donned our packs and we'd already broken rule number one: keep the lines of communication open. After leaving late, he had altered our route: we were



Camping at the fire devastated Westons Hut. Right, fed up on the Diamantina Spur. Rob Clayton

now doing the trip in the reverse direction. This would take us up that bitch known as the Diamantina Spur, the one spur I had specifically said I would not climb. The problem was that I did not know this until I was writing it in the intentions book.

I like walking with him but at this point I could gladly have kicked him. Foolishly I said nothing, blithely accepted my fate, and walked on down Swindlers Spur in the dwindling light. We spoke little, pondered a lot.

I have the philosophy that you will never go anywhere if you only travel on the sunny days. This attitude has carried us through some amazing trips, keeping us smiling when crying has seemed easier. But this Easter the gods were smiling on us, pouring sunshine on our troubles for the entire trip.

Dibbins Hut is set in the most gorgeous valley and it is difficult to carry your problems there. Some poor bugger walking from Brisbane to Melbourne had been through a few days earlier and cleaned the hut up, but it did little to quell the masses of European wasps. However, it did make me consider the mindset of a solo walker undertaking such a journey. I would be constantly seeking out the company of others: the thought of so much time alone would send me scurrying to the nearest counsellor.

After an icy night during which our water bags froze, we headed up along the AAWT via Cobungra Gap and the Basalt Temple. This was all new terrain to me, giving me the sense of discovery that I covet, the feeling that you are the first.

Heading uphill first thing in the morning is always a good heart-starter, and we both

needed the accompanying free endorphins. So far nothing had been said about our change of direction, or the impending 'spur of contention'. If he wasn't thinking about it, I was doing nothing else.

A side trip at Youngs Spur took us down to Youngs Hut. The day remained spectacular and we had a strong urge to remain at this beautiful

reduced to cinders. We ate our dinner and camped on a small patch of green beside the flapping yellow tape attached to the ruin, and fell asleep listening to the creaking of fallen corrugated iron. It was a sad end to a gorgeous day.

The next morning we headed down the closed four-wheel-drive track to Blairs Hut, then along the logging track at the bottom. It was another

what it came to and it had nothing to do with that spur. This was also our life.

It had been blood, sweat and tears to get this far but the trip had been beautiful. Surely the view from the top would be spectacular and the sense of achievement worth the effort, making us stronger for the rest of the journey? Whatever that journey might be and wherever



*I picked up my pack and slung it on my sweaty back, wiped my tears into black streaks on my cheeks and stepped on up the non-existent track.*

place. It's one of those spots to which you promise you will return, and we could already see potential cross-country ski trips connecting through to the walking track at Dinner Plain. That's the way it usually goes with us; one trip rolls into the next.

Returning the way we had come, we headed north to join the track down to Westons Hut site. We made good time on the AAWT, crossing the plains where you can see forever, looking forward to our hard-earned dinner and our warm tent.

One of the principal motives for undertaking this walk in the first place was our paternalistic attitude towards the High Country. Like many Victorians, we are fiercely protective of this area, and we wanted to see firsthand the damage inflicted by the bushfires.

Most of the recent fires had spared this area and we were encouraged by the amount of regrowth since the summer of 2005. Every new shoot was a reason for celebration and we pointed them out to each other like excited children. As a consequence, we were shattered when we clapped eyes on the recent wave of devastation wreaked on Westons Hut and the Diamantina Spur. The area can reasonably tolerate one fire, but two in such a short time must test the fragile region's resilience. We walked down the spur through ash, over fallen trees and ground broken by the intensity of the heat. The hut was a ruin and for several kilometres everything had been

sunny day and the decision to take a break beside the West Kiewa River was an easy one: we might never go that way again and certainly never in such perfect conditions. Perhaps that's why I failed to mention my growing anxiety about the spur. I had convinced myself that I didn't have a choice. But you always have a choice and there are other routes; I'd just chosen to be a martyr.

So, to the spur in question. It's a complete bitch—there's no other word for it I'm afraid. Not only that, but it had been burnt and the track was difficult to locate. It's straight up, then up some more. Then, just when you think you can't get any dirtier and the track can't get any steeper, it goes up again.

I coped reasonably well for the first hour but then I lost it, took off my pack and tossed it, ranting at Rob: 'I never wanted to walk up here in the first place. I told you that.' Blah blah blah, including assorted expletives.

He is an amazing man, he truly is. He didn't do his block as I would have, and was in the process of doing. He calmly put his pack down and offered me a drink and an alternative—we could go back down and find another route up. At this point I really lost touch. Go back down after all the sweat and dirt of getting this far? Did I look that mad? But continuing up was almost beyond me. I looked up, I looked down. I sat down on my filthy pack and cried. This is

it went...I picked up my pack and slung it on my sweaty back, wiped my tears into black streaks on my cheeks and stepped on up the non-existent track. Rob led the way.

The spur did end and I was truly wrecked. We camped in a clearing a few hundred metres from High Knob and Rob walked over to Mt Featherstop to get water from the new hut.

The importance of what had happened that day was dawning on me. My behaviour had appalled even me, but it also served up one of life's lessons: it will get tough, but the trip will be worth it. I cooked a delicious dinner and opened the bottle of red I had lugged up. Small offerings for bad behaviour.

The walk across the top of the Razorback was spectacular and absolutely worth it, especially as there wasn't any wind and the sun stayed out. We had a chance for a good talk, and this time I was rational. Walking is always my favourite time to communicate and the walk reminded us that this is where it had all begun. It was valid then, where it was still just as valid? The answer was yes.

We had given ourselves the metaphorical laundering—definitely a good thing. However, we were still literally black from the ash and this would take some serious cleaning when we got home, both in the literal and metaphorical sense. I didn't care. The walk had been a test of endurance in many ways, and was much more satisfying for the effort. These were my final thoughts as we collected our car from the car park and began the long drive home. 🍷

Judy Clayton is a 40 something mother of two studying health and ecology whilst juggling two jobs and planning, always planning, the next big walk. This year it's the Pilbara. She lives on a sustainable property in Cape Schanck and never plans on moving.



**PAIN PRODUCES CLARITY. I KNEW WHAT HAD TO BE DONE BUT, LYING** on the edge of Isidiuidu village at 1 a.m., what had to be done was the last thing in the world that I wanted to do.

'Help! Jack, come over here—I really need help,' I called through the dark to Jack Muia. I'd arrived unannounced on his beach the previous day. As the kayak slid on to the sand I'd been met with the usual questioning eyes and helpful hands. Unable to stand, I sat straight-legged, feeling each pulse of blood coursing into my infected leg. The story tumbled out as I unwrapped the loose bandage applied that morning.

'It's been getting worse for a week, I think it's a spider bite but it's just not getting better. Every day more painful.' I spoke too fast but Jack listened patiently and knelt down to look at the swollen knee. He moved to touch it but my hand shot out, grabbing his wrist with a speed that surprised us both. Withdrawing, he said: 'Boil. We can fix this.'

The knot of anxiety that had been growing in my belly began to unravel.

'You can fix this? Are you sure? I mean, you can make this better?' I asked repeatedly, to make sure I'd understood. Several more people had gathered around, and they lifted me up the beach before retrieving the kayak. Jack's wife boiled water and carefully sponged down my leg. Using two poles I was made to stand up. A stream of blood—mixed with pus and clots—ran freely down to my ankle. Jerry, one of Jack's sons, mopped it up without even a hint of disgust. For another hour it erupted on and off. Freshly cooked kau-kau was offered but I had no appetite. Alotau, the capital of Milne Bay Province, and a doctor were another 150 kilometres east. If I could get some sleep and the worst of the infection had been squeezed out—perhaps...just maybe... But by 1 a.m., sleepless, nauseous, immobilised and stripped of false illusion, I called through the dark to Jack.

The village had a communal outboard dinghy but no petrol. No roads or airstrips penetrated the steep coastal mountains in this corner of Papua New Guinea. The only way out was to call someone in. At around 6 a.m. I took a deliberately deep breath to compose myself and dialled Australia on the satellite phone. The sleepy voice of my sister-in-law and expedition coordinator, Bec, came crackling through.

'Bec, I'm in a bit of trouble over here...I need a rescue.'

After a volley of static-interrupted conversations between myself and Bec, and then between Bec and government people in Canberra and Chris Abel in Alotau, a charter boat was dispatched and was due mid-afternoon. Another sister-in-law, Cathy, a surgeon, rang to give medical advice.

'What you're describing doesn't sound good, Andy. You might have to come straight to Cairns for treatment.' The concern in her voice, coupled with the way I felt, worried me. Jerry and his younger brother Albert sat outside the tent thumbing through a Pidgin English dictionary I'd given them. I unzipped the inner and handed out half a bag of balloons. 'If I'm going back to Australia, I won't be needing these,' I told them.

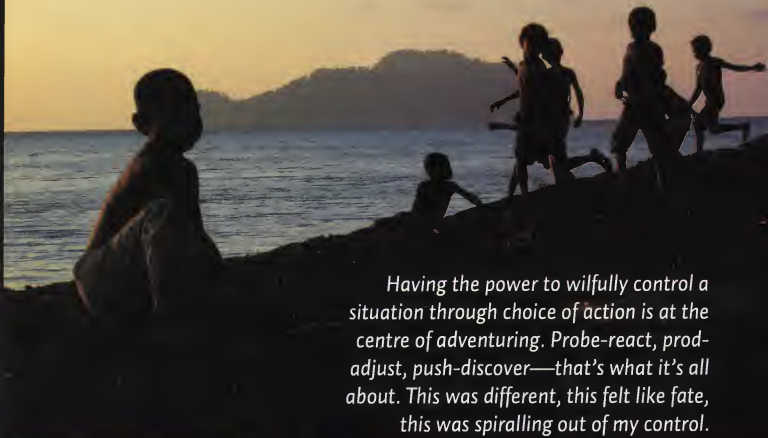
Resting back down, I checked my heart rate, steady but elevated on 120. Villagers wandered by, some politely pretending not to look, others squatting outside, chatting quietly. Jack, neglecting his usual gardening duties, hovered nearby. My thoughts were jumbled. As freshly blown-up balloons and laughter bounced off children's fingertips, a strangely festive atmosphere lingered under the coconut palms. Not joining the party, I alternated between melancholy acceptance that the journey was over and cautious optimism that I could be repaired in Alotau and continue paddling. As the lunch hour ticked over, a wave of nausea forced the water I had slowly sipped from my stomach and on to the sand. My heart rate rose to between 150 and 160 beats a minute. I turned to ask Jerry something but forgot what it was I needed, and then forgot Jerry's name completely. I stared at my hand before tucking it under my armpit. My temperature was rising. Movement was slow and deliberate, but I kept finding myself wondering what I was doing. Where was I moving this bag to? What time is it? Why is my head racing and skin so dry? How can this armpit be burning hot and yet I feel cold? Throughout the confusion I knew it was all wrong. I was still aware enough to know that I was in trouble.

**Main photo on right, children at play on Manam Island. Inset from left to right, a flotilla of canoes pass by on their way home from nearby Oro Bay; I'm given watermelon and coconuts to speed my way. The author at Vincke Point, Morobe Province on the north coast.** All uncredited photos by the author  
Laid out by the infected knee at Isidiuidu. Jack Muia



# Don't

Andrew Hughes embraces the unknown in search of adventure on an epic paddle around Papua New Guinea



*Having the power to wilfully control a situation through choice of action is at the centre of adventuring. Probe-react, prod-adjust, push-discover—that's what it's all about. This was different, this felt like fate, this was spiralling out of my control.*



# fight it

'Jerry', I said, remembering my young protector's name, 'if I close my eyes and they don't open for a while, it means I'm okay, but make sure I still go on the boat. No matter what happens, make sure they take me on the boat, okay? Now go and get Jack'.

I pulled myself out of the tent and on to the palm matting. Jack came with a bucket of water and began sponging me down. A strong breeze blew warm from the south-east across the beachside village. Looking up, I stared between the overcast sky and Jack's bushy beard. The family crouched around quietly. The surviving balloons had been carried away to be treasured by the children another day. In a moment of clarity I realised that, although my situation wasn't ideal, I was surrounded by a peaceful generosity that made it impossible to feel upset.

It was strangely calming to know that however badly I'd misjudged my condition up to this point, it was now out of my hands. Apart from keeping my eyes open and talking to Jack, I was useless—like being a passenger in a speeding car, only I couldn't ask the driver to stop. Having the power to willfully control a situation through choice of action is at the centre of adventuring. Probe-react, prod-adjust, push-discover—that's what it's all about. This was different, this felt like fate, this was spiralling out of my control.

Jack continued trying to cool me down. I continued being confused. But, just as the mist of infection had snuck behind my eyes and coiled around my brain, now it parted. The sharpness returned as my heart rate dropped back to 120. Jack wanted to stop sponging. He said I felt cold.

'Only on the outside, Jack, but still hot on the inside. Keep going, please.'

Then I started shivering and decided that perhaps I was not the best person to monitor my health. Jerry massaged the blood back into my toes and I felt elation mixed with a wonder that went beyond balloons and laughter and words. The rescue boat arrived and loaded me aboard with the kayak. As we navigated through the reef I looked back to the waving villagers, Jack and his family among them, and raised my hand in inadequate thanks. It may have been the painkillers beginning to kick in, or the reassuring drone of the outboard engine, but the jarring five-hour journey to hospital hurt less than it should have.

The original plan, to begin 800 kilometres up the Fly River and paddle to the coast before traversing the southern and northern coastlines, had been abandoned. A shipping error had left me stranded in the remote Western Province township of Kiunga for ten days without the kayak. Unable to afford the time and expense of further delays, I'd flown to Port Moresby to collect the kayak in person. Launching quietly from the Royal Papua Yacht Club with bags full of rice and tinned tuna, I headed into the teeth of the south-east trade wind with a shortened, though still uncertain, path ahead.

Landing among unsuspecting villagers and battling an unrelenting headwind made it hard to find the rhythm of the journey in the early days. Then, camped on an offshore island watching the waves wrap around the reef, I noticed a small red dot on my knee. It hurt to touch so I dabbed on a precautionary smear of antibiotic cream. Over the next week, behind each new, delightful, head-shaking and eye-popping experience was the spreading ache in my knee. Mangoes and bananas offered by generous locals were accepted with a limp; the tent was pitched in each new village with less vigour. Finally, exhausted, out of luck and out of Panadeine, I laid myself at Jack Muia's feet and was rescued from Isidiudiu.

After five days in hospital and a further ten recovering at Masurina Lodge, I hobbled down to see Dr Aiaker for the last time. A month in Papua New Guinea had brought me frustration, delight, confusion and fear. Dr Aiaker looked at my knee and pushed his fingers into the recovering flesh above and below before looking me squarely in the eye.

'This is no problem any more. That does not mean you will have no problem, but this is not it. You can do your adventure again—and good luck with it, friend.'

Rounding East Cape a few days later marked a change in mindset. The predominantly south-easterly wind swung behind me. Apart from a few bumps and lumps, the coast stretched uninterrupted for 2000 kilometres to the north-west. With a heightened appreciation of my mortality, I paddled deeper into this land of the unexpected.

The people at Aliye allowed me to camp on the dark pebbles of their village. I arrived before sunset and quickly set up. A small group politely watched as I unpacked the kayak and put the tent together. As usual, a few young men stepped forward to offer their help. With the cooker boiling rice, I wrote the daily dispatch and sent it out using the satellite phone. I felt a deep sense of peace and freedom. After 1200 kilometres of





**Clockwise from left**, John helping me build a sail made of driftwood, a spare fly, fishing line and Elastoplast. Jack Muia attempting to cool me down; without Jack and his family my condition could have become much worse. Closing in on the smoking cone of Manam Island. The delightful villagers on Wei Island made me feel welcome in their remote home in the Bismarck Sea.



in the vestibule, came sleep. But at midnight I awoke with clenched buttocks and stumbled down the clinking beach for relief. By morning I was drained and nauseous. Squatting once again in the early light, I watched an outrigger canoe, laden with bananas and fresh produce, launch on a trading mission. A man with a dangle bush knife walked past my crouched and woeful figure, on his way to the garden and another day of work. He said hello without embarrassment, but I decided I needed to be sick and pathetic in a private place. The villagers understood and pointed across the bay to a distant shadow. It looked like the mainland but was a detached island. They told me that there used to be trainee priests living there but that it was now empty. The approaching reef was ringed with white water, with only a small gap allowing passage through. With serious noises now gurgling from my belly, I landed on a tiny rocky opening with a small clearing. That night in my diary I wrote:

*Made it to rough campsite inside reef. Just sat on kayak sabbings until I vomited. Slow set-up but finally lying down. Everything took time, even getting Panadol for headache and Stenazine for nausea. Could handle a little water and snoozed for afternoon. Tried a few biscuits but guts protesting again. I really could go home now.*

With no energy, and motivation at a low ebb, I lay in bed the following morning, content just to be there and nothing more. A voice, low and gentle, but stark against the chattering of birds and the slosh of waves, came drifting into the tent.



A canoe being built on the slopes of Biem Island. Although dinghies are common in some areas, outrigger canoes are still the most reliable way to travel.

'Hello', called John from outside. 'Hello. Who is there?'

Wrapped in a sarong, I ventured out to talk to this new stranger. He had been about to go spear fishing on the reef when he saw my tent. I pulled out the map and explained what I was doing. On a whim we decided to build a sail to take advantage of the wind. John selected the driftwood for a mast and spars. Using a tarpaulin, fishing line and Elastoplast, we cobbled it together over the afternoon. As we worked, we talked. John told me how his father had once hidden a letter from Melbourne University to his older brother who, after a successful scholarship in Australia, had been accepted into the university. His father had not wanted to risk losing him to Australia forever. He is now a lawyer in Port Moresby but still only rarely visits his home village. John had not made it that far through the Papua New Guinea education system and was philosophical about life in the village.

'It can be difficult to get kina (money), you know, but I have my garden and my wife... the only three things we really need more of are kerosene, salt and soap.' Listening to John's stories, I had a reality check and decided that a sore tummy was not good enough reason to escape home with exaggerated tales of woe to blur my retreat.

Just two days later, at about 11.30 in the morning, I named the new sail 'Temptation'. It was clutching more wind than I could handle and taking us careening across the face of a storm. First there were big fat raindrops, splat, splat, millions of them, raising a soft blanket of wool over the water. Then a few sweeps of warning wind that yelled, 'You're in big trouble now, novice kayak sailor!' It came from the east and I was bearing north-west. On instinct rather than from training, I turned the paddle blade to dig and slide on top like an outrigger, and leaned forward and across, bracing with all my weight. The speed made the rudder hum.

The waves grew quickly as I fixed my concentration on the quarter they were bearing down from. A broken crest caught part of the sail and tipped us wildly, but we emerged upright and still flying along. In the middle of a short cut across a deep gulf, the nearest land lay 20 kilometres or more in each direction. The onset of the storm had been preceded by no obvious warning. Its ferocity left no doubt that any misplaced movement would be punished by a capsizing, the mere thought of which put a hammer in my heart. I leaned further forward and pushed into the racing water until my forearms cramped. 'I'm a novice sailor!', I screamed, 'I'm not ready for this part yet'. The leading edge of the tempest lasted maybe an hour, probably half that. The back end continued all day and wasn't much better. Visibility was down to a few kilometres so I was on compass until near landfall.

Waking each morning, in a village or on a beach with white coral or dark mineral sands, I had one recurring thought: 'Don't fight it if you don't know what it is.' It was the chorus to a song I'd heard on the radio before leaving Australia. I didn't know who sang it, or any of the other words, but the chorus had been stuck in my head for months. Each day it reminded me that all I knew for sure was that I had no idea how the day would end. The certainty of surprise never failed me. Over the next weeks I paused at the Tufi floods to let an infection heal, passed Oro Bay where recent storm surges and flooded rivers had caused devastation, camped on islands with shark-fishers, fought the violent waters of Vitiaz Strait, and paddled, paddled, paddled. Most days I would wake at 5.30 am, use the cover of darkness to squat on the designated shoreline, farewell new friends as the sun rose and paddle until late afternoon. If I had no bananas or pawpaw I might stop at a village to buy some, though usually they were given freely. At Madang, a major regional centre, I stopped for a few days to restock and recharge for the final two-week leg to the top. It included a week of hopping through the Schouten Islands to avoid the raging mouth of the Sepik River. The first stop was a smoking volcano called Manam Island.

Josephine Aung looked from the kayak up to my face. The faded blue ink of tattoos and deep wrinkles told a story of tradition and toil. The bilum, full of garden produce, slipped from her forehead to the ground. The strong grip around my waist relaxed as she sank to her knees, wailing. I crouched but didn't understand. Tony, my self-appointed interpreter on Manam Island, whispered over my shoulder that she was sad for me, travelling so far in a *liklik* kanu (small canoe). I pointed to the name of the kayak: 'Abu meri Hope na abu meri Grace (abu meri is Pidgin for grandmother), like you, Josephine. Don't worry, Granny Hope and Granny Grace won't let me down, I'll stay safe.' I could have added that perhaps living on an active volcano has its fair share of risk too. Manam Island erupted some years ago and everyone was evacuated to the mainland. Half the villagers have returned and are still in the process of rebuilding their homes and gardens. Josephine couldn't be consoled and had to be assisted up to the village, which was behind the cobbled shore where I'd pitched camp. I asked Tony again if I'd done something wrong but he insisted that Josephine was simply feeling very sorry for me. There was a generous look in his eyes that said: 'Don't worry, you aren't supposed to understand it.' And I didn't, not really.

From Port Moresby to Vanimo. From terrifying storm to ocean so quiet I dared not whisper. From flesh-eating infection to the warm, body-drying sun of late afternoon. From pseudo shark attack to a clownfish that peeped from the reef and questioned, rightly, who really was the clown. From allegations of piracy to a grandmother crying for a stranger upon her shores. It was a journey not counted by kilometres or even days, but by people, villages, beaches and bilums. Papua New Guinea asked me to lose myself, to release the grip of expectation that provides order out of chaos. And when I resisted, she stopped asking and simply demanded it. The song—by the Panics, I've since discovered—that helped me lose myself in a country that demands it still lingers: don't fight it if you don't know what it is. 🌊

Andrew Hughes is a teacher who finds himself in the bush, on the road, or in the water more than in the classroom. Based under the ever inspiring Mt Wellington in Hobart, he plots new adventures to share with students through [www.expeditionclass.com](http://www.expeditionclass.com).



# THE Tarkine

## Tasmania's Threatened Labyrinth

**Eli Greig explores the largest cool temperate rainforest in the southern hemisphere, now threatened by a tourist road**

### **Day one: out of the bus and across the Arthur River**

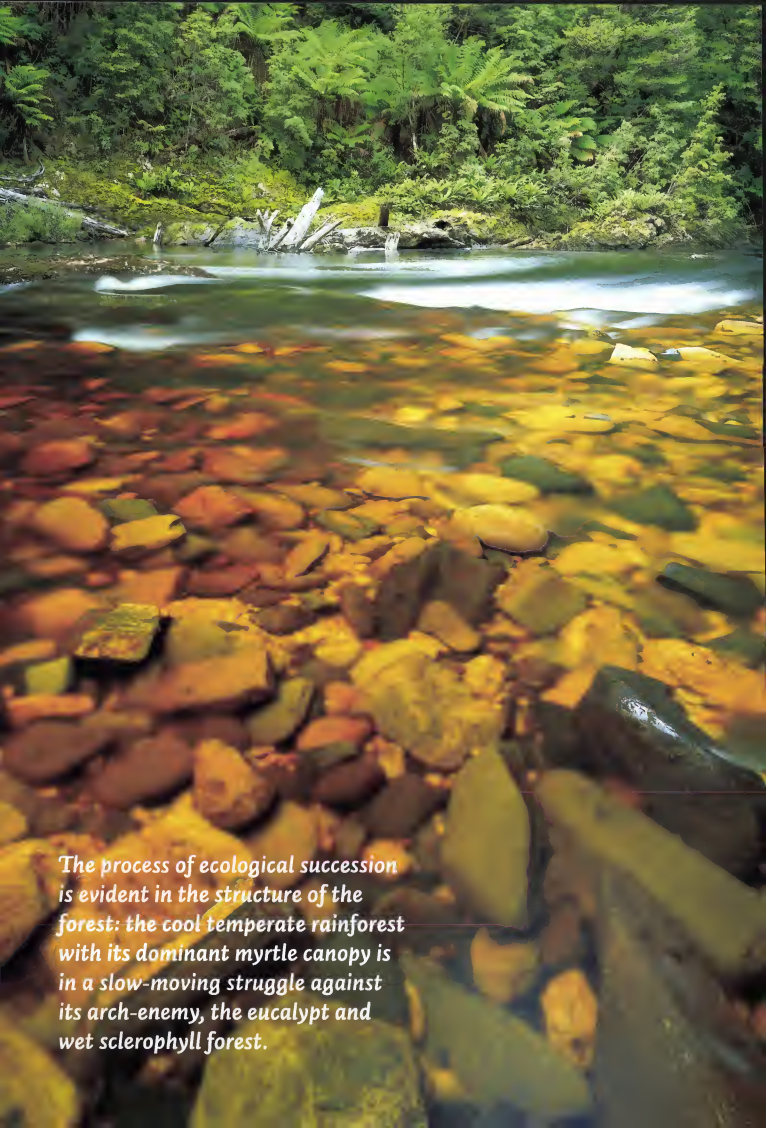
This is it! The farmland and regrowth forest are behind us as we stand on the decaying forestry bridge that signals the start of the walk, the Arthur River flowing beneath. We fill our bottles with tannin-stained water, don our packs and trudge towards the Tarkine.

I'm walking into the heart of this threatened wilderness on the Tarkine Trail, a walk pioneered by the Tarkine National Coalition and Tarkine Trails. It was built not only to explore the Tarkine, but also to highlight the alternative economy waiting to be exploited in Tassie's remote north-west, a region that has missed a lot of the tourism boom. Establishing this week-long track was an arduous task, but well worth the effort to create this multiday, eco-friendly walk, which can be walked with or without a guide.

The first section of day one follows the old forestry road and we've been warned that it's a bit of a slog. The old saying that it takes two full days of walking to get back into the swing of things is ringing in my ears but even so the

**Clockwise from left, a freshwater crayfish on the Arthur River. The beautiful Tarkine Falls. All uncredited photos Eli Greig. Native laurel on the Rapid River. The Rapid River (and overleaf). Both photos by Rob Blakers.**





*The process of ecological succession is evident in the structure of the forest: the cool temperate rainforest with its dominant myrtle canopy is in a slow-moving struggle against its arch-enemy, the eucalypt and wet sclerophyll forest.*

track just seems to keep on going up and around, and up some more. I don't have a map and I'm unfamiliar with the walk, so I just tell myself that each corner is the last. Alas for my poor lungs and feet, the track continues for a considerable amount of time: I deem it 'Heartbreak Hill'.

After a few kilometres the track reaches the top of a ridge from where we get the first view of our route. Rolling hills clothed in a distinctive canopy of cool temperate rainforest stretch out to the horizon—the magnificent Tarkine. Looking south we can see the valleys we will cross, the ridges we will climb, and even a button-grass ridge that we will pass on the third day. We continue along the ridge, passing the rusted remnants of old forestry equipment. At this point, we leave the track and delve into the forest, following the pink tags down through thickets of tea tree and young myrtle. We pay careful attention to these pink beacons as without them one could become hopelessly lost. The track plunges down into the bottom of the valley where we cross some streams and boggy terrain before finally reaching the entrance to the Tarkine proper.

After a relatively short walk across the valley floor, we reach the first night's camp. Nestled amongst myrtles and next to a beautiful cascade, this is the perfect camping spot. I perform my ritual, seeking the ideal site: no tree limbs that could fall on the tent, no nests of vipers, scorpions or other venomous creatures and, most importantly, a lovely view of the forest for when the morning light hits.

### Day two: into the tall forest

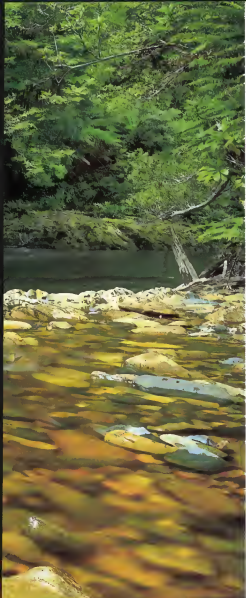
After some early morning photos, we start the day with warming porridge and Rob's outrageous

anecdotes. He is of the opinion that the local gang of yellow-tailed black cockatoos are really reincarnated monkeys whose sole purpose is to torment happy campers. Apparently he has shared multiple camps with the same gang, who deliberately choose to sit in the trees above him, dropping all sorts of detritus on him and rifling through his pack at night.

We retrace the previous afternoon's steps and take a pack-free stroll down to the intriguingly named Gorge of Faces. We walk along the tagged track and then head parallel to the noisy river until dropping over a knoll. The river runs clearly across the gravel bottom before entering the small and delicate gorge.

Crossing the Pinner River, we are finally in the northern section of the Tarkine's heart. It is immediately obvious that this mature forest is completely free from human interference; the change is dramatic and beautiful. I develop delusions of grandeur and think that I will be able to get that one great photo and emulate the great art of Dombrowskis; dream on Eli.

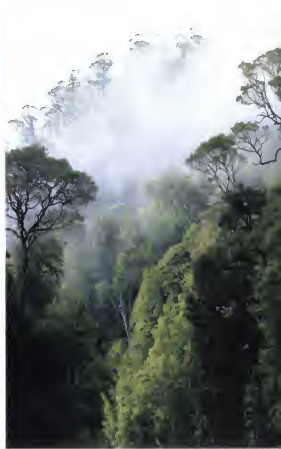
The process of ecological succession is evident in the structure of the forest: the cool temperate rainforest with its dominant myrtle canopy is in a slow-moving struggle against its arch-enemy, the eucalypt and wet sclerophyll forest. This battle can be played out over hundreds or even thousands of years but is often sped up by natural or human-induced disturbance. We walk onwards and upwards on the northern slopes of this unnamed mountain. The forest is predominantly huge *Eucalyptus obliqua*, which burst through the canopy and create a cathedral-like atmosphere. On the sheltered southern side of the ridges, the invading army of myrtle is ready to pounce at the first opportunity. This section of the walk is one of my



Main photo, the Rapid River, a major tributary of the Arthur River. Blakers

Right, descent into dry heath forest on day three.

For right, Tarkine rainforest shrouded in mist. Blakers





## The road to disaster?

The Tarkine encompasses 447 000 hectares of wilderness including the southern hemisphere's largest single tract of temperate rainforest, an extraordinary wealth of Aboriginal sites, and habitat for more than 50 threatened species. There is now a proposal for a \$23 million Tarkine Tourist Loop Road that would cut through forests of World Heritage value, require bridges over free-flowing rivers and directly threaten existing and proposed ecotourism ventures.

According to Forestry Tasmania, development of the Tarkine road would entail upgrading 127 kilometres of existing gravel roads and tracks, and completing a 7.6 kilometre link, of which 5.4 kilometres would require new roads. Forestry Tasmania states that the road would deliver new jobs and new tourism opportunities to a neglected region with a lower visitation rate than other areas in Tasmania.

In contrast, the Tarkine National Coalition (TNC) believe that, rather than attracting new tourists, the road would decrease the visitor experience and siphon money away from a strategic tourism plan proposed for the entire region. Most concerning to both the TNC and tourism operator Tarkine Trails is that the 5.4 kilometres of new road directly threatens the heart of the forest and destroys the wilderness value of the six-day Tarkine rainforest track.

While the road is supported by the Tasmanian Government, Federal Opposition leader Malcolm Turnbull disagrees. 'This is a bad idea. We are opposed to it, as are the state Liberals.' The Liberals back an alternative proposal for the Tarkine developed by the Cradle Coast Authority, which has more support from local councils.

The Tasmanian Greens also condemn the proposal. 'No one I know or have heard about—apart from Forestry Tasmania and the Bartlett Government—thinks this road is anything but a stupid idea', tourism spokesperson Casey O'Connor said. 'It will do nothing to keep visitors in the area supporting local operators and businesses. In fact, most visitors will be in and out of the Tarkine in less than four hours once they have done the round trip.'

The Tarkine's nomination for Federal Heritage listing is with the Federal Environment Minister at present, and the construction of this road would threaten critical values contributing to its case. Opposition from environmental and community groups and concerned individuals is mounting and could become a flashpoint if construction proceeds.

### Act now

#### Lobbying

Contact the TNC regarding the campaign to stop the road: [www.tnc.org.au](http://www.tnc.org.au)

#### See it for yourself

Tarkine Trails is running fundraiser walks to support a community awareness campaign in north-west Tasmania. Visit [www.tarkinetrails.com.au](http://www.tarkinetrails.com.au) for more details.

favourites: the mix of cool temperate rainforest and wet sclerophyll is so beautiful that I remember it rather than the pain of the long climb.

After a couple of false plateaus and wished for mountain tops, we reach our designated lunch spot beneath a huge eucalypt. There is a perfect little couch on the base of the tree with some shade for making sandwiches.

forest. But high on this mountain, with the incessant chant of the mopoke, I have an excellent sleep.

### Day three

I wake up with a Beatles' song ringing in my head—not a bad start to the day. The descent through a picturesque grove is a welcome change



Rob fording the Arthur River on the final day of the walk, carrying Nicholas's homemade crutches. **Opposite page, Chris near the Tree Gate on day two.**

After lunch we follow the pink tags out of the mixed forest and into the pure rainforest—that's it for tall eucalypts for the rest of the week. After a walk up and over another plateau, we reach the aptly named tree-gate, the entry to Myrtleville. The tree-gate is formed by two huge conjoined eucalypts fallen in perfect symmetry, one pointing north and the other south: where their bases meet there is a perfect passage.

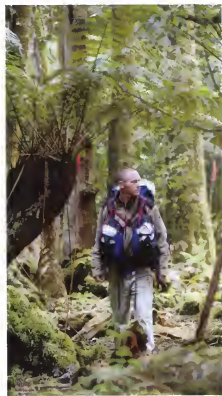
We keep walking up the ever-thinning ridge until we reach the campsite, a lovely glade set amongst a stand of old-growth myrtle. We set up and get down to the serious business of cooking dinner. The microclimate seems ripe for growing all sorts of alien-looking fungi, in particular the purple coral fungi which we are apparently very fortunate to see. It normally takes me a night or two to settle into the rhythm of the

from the climbing of the first two days. We reach an unnamed creek that would make any mainland farmer cry with envy and fill our bottles to the brim. After a steep climb, I see the first stand of horizontal scrub, falling over itself and twisted into a maze of tunnels. Fortunately, the pioneers of this track pursued a moderate route around the scrub rather than succumbing to the most masochistic of bush-walking tendencies and going straight through.

We are on a typically tight schedule—what is it with us bushwalkers? So we admire the beauty at a steady pace and continue uphill towards lunch and the Shrine. We hear the Shrine before we can see it: the sound of rushing water is always lovely, but particularly so when it indicates a stop.

We drop our packs and explore the area. I am a little hesitant to head down to the bottom

of the falls as it's wet and quite steep. I can see some of the group in the ferns at the base of the forest and I can hear someone scrambling around the top of the falls—not the wisest course of action but I ignore it because of the sheer beauty around me. Suddenly, I hear rocks moving and plunging. I look up to see Nicholas on his arse, sliding towards disaster and pain. In the split second available, I have already imagined him sliding over the edge, the rescue and pain and impossible evacuation. Nic slides down the stream, his legs going over the edge of the waterfall, but his left arm lashes out and grabs the rotting hulk of an old tree fern. I shout for someone to run around and pull him up, but his survival instincts have kicked in. With amazing agility, he pulls himself up with one arm and scampers away from the edge. As Nic emerges from the scrub, I think he is fully aware of what could have been. We have a brief discussion, leave it at that and go back to camp. We decide to christen the falls St Nicholas Falls.



After a nice lunch we head off towards the Octopus's Garden, the Tarkine Falls and our third night's camp. The Octopus's Garden is a very large plateau of myrtle trees, their buttresses rising above the forest floor, resembling the legs of a walking octopus. We pause to take some snaps and proceed down towards the next patch of horizontal scrub. I'm resting on a log to take in the scenery when Nic passes me, clambering over the obstacle. I hear a pop and Nic tumbles to the ground in pain. Everyone gathers around and he indicates that he has hurt his ankle. We all silently dread the prospect of a broken ankle: two days of walking and some major rivers separate us from a remote, disused logging track. After much investigation, the diagnosis is a seriously twisted ankle with the possibility of a snapped tendon. There is not much we can do: the injury does not war-

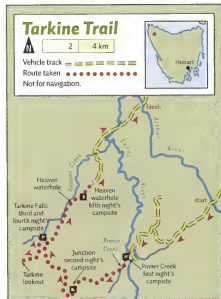
rant setting off our EPIRB, but Nic is in a state of considerable discomfort and distress. Our group decides to fashion some crutches and proceed slowly to camp, from where we can assess the situation. Ah, St Nicholas, the stoic lion-heart: he is gentle and unassuming, interested in the small and seemingly insignificant details of the forest, but he is very clumsy.

The rest of the walk is slow, peaceful and uneventful. We skirt some more scrub, follow a lovely creek upstream and find our campsite in a hollow, elevated valley overlooking the Tarkine Falls. It is a wonderful spot.

I visit the falls and contemplate the day and what a disaster it could have been. Nic later explains, tongue firmly in cheek, that as a Frenchman it was his patriotic duty to have an existential bushwalking experience. We all laugh and hope for a less eventful day tomorrow.

### Day four

I wake to a slight drizzle that clears as soon as I leave the dreamy comfort of my tent. After a



quick breakfast, we head off for a pack-less and Nic-less walk to the button-grass plateau glimpsed at the start of the trip. We head through the forest and enter a site that resembles a mini logging coupe: the entire canopy is gone and trunks lie splintered across the forest floor. The sunlight is harsh and we can only guess at what happened: a mini tornado, lightning or something more mythical?

After a couple of kilometres we leave the forest and descend into a dry valley, then begin the ascent toward the button-grass summit. The northern slope of this mountain seems alien after the rainforest of the past few days: it is dry, hot and a maze of tea tree. At first it appears rather bland, but the higher I climb and the closer I look the more I notice the subtle beauty of this ecosystem: heath flowers are abundant amongst a forest of flowering boronia, banksia and fire-engine-red bottlebrush.

We climb out of the forest on to the button grass, before ascending a steep ridge to the summit and the incongruous sight of a navigation pole and old road. We have an extensive 360° view of the Tarkine. To the south the rainforested hills and button-grass plains disappear into the

distant Norfolk Range, while the Savage River National Park forms a verdant, lush and seemingly impenetrable barrier to the east. To the north is the Arthur River valley where we started the walk days earlier. We can see where we will head tomorrow, and the Nut at Stanley in the distance. Mt Cameron is to the west, backed by the remote west coast and the edge of the world.

We eat a wasabi-infused lunch and admire the largest contiguous patch of cool temperate rainforest in the southern hemisphere. A pair of endangered Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagles soar high above. After lunch we retrace our steps and collapse, before dinner and a deep sleep.

### Day five

A soft rain overnight dampens the forest and softens the ground underfoot. After another nice brekkie, we decamp and head north along Waterfall Creek. Nic walks relatively quickly despite using his handmade crutches. His gear is distributed amongst the group and Colin has attached Nic's pack to his own, making him look like a grotesque, unwieldy Hunchback of the Tarkine.

All morning we follow the creek through spectacular rainforest, passing scenery that would be a major tourist attraction at any other time or in any other location. But our sights are set on Heaven. We cross Waterfall Creek a number of times, arriving around midday. Heaven is a gorgeous waterhole with a cascade at one end and a waterfall at the other. We spend a couple of hours here, eating food, swimming, drinking coffee, exploring the gorges and drinking more coffee. This place seems so remote and isolated that I easily imagine a Tasmanian tiger emerging from the forest to drink from the creek. But alas, no such luck.

### Day six

It has rained all night and is still raining as we eat breakfast and pack up. It continues to rain all day but I don't care: it is absolutely beautiful in the rainforest. We head down the mountain towards the Arthur River, which we must ford to end our journey. The descent is beautiful until we reach an old forestry track covered in fallen logs and surrounded by dry, scraggly regrowth. As I begin to despair at the state of the environment, I am taken aback by the sight in front of me: a beautiful valley of mature forest. We descend to a decrepit bridge that crosses the Lyons River—another heavenly place. We hang around for half an hour taking photos and waiting out a downpour.

We follow the track over a few hills to the first river and a wide but shallow crossing. After a very soggy lunch, our minds and cold bodies begin to hanker for the end of the day. We head up the road, across and down to the Arthur River. The river is wide and deep, crystal clear and orange from tannin. We all make it across without a problem and even have the luck to spot a not-so-giant freshwater crayfish on the river bank: judging by its size, it's probably only a decade or so old. It's a suitable conclusion to an awesome week. 🐟

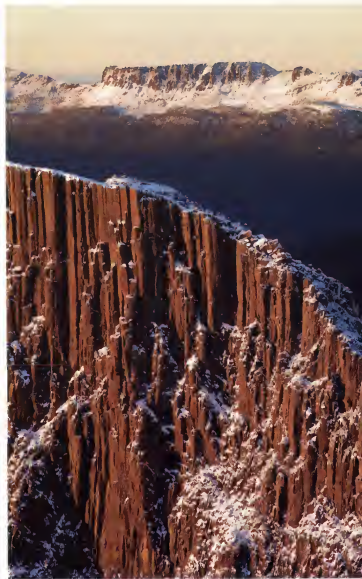
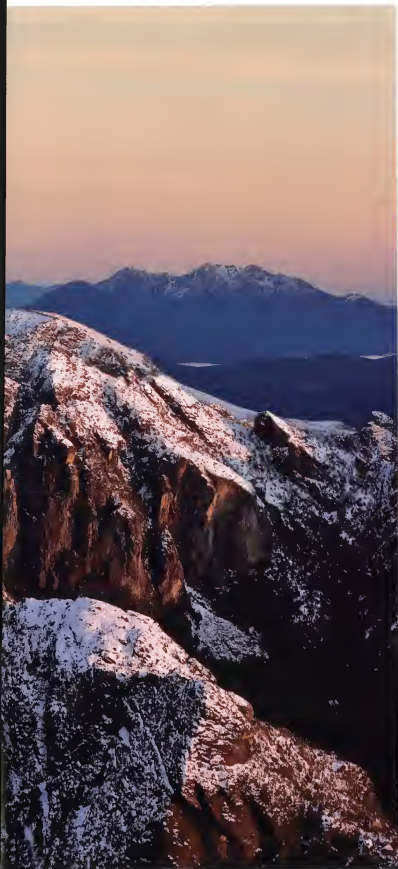
Elh Greig has been spending time in the Australian bush since he was a child, first introduced to our unique environment by his father in the Grampians. From there Elh has walked all over Australia and the world and, in particular, the Tarkine.





# A *Southern* Winter

Grant Dixon captures the beauty of Tasmania's wildest places in winter



The snow-covered cliffs of the Acropolis, Cradle Mountain–Lake St Clair National Park.

**Left,** Frenchmans Cap at sunrise, Franklin–Gordon Wild Rivers National Park.





*Clockwise from far left, the sheer cliffs of Mt Geryon at dawn, Cradle Mountain–Lake St Clair National Park. Ice-frosted cliffs at Mt Field West, Mt Field National Park. A copse of native pencil pines below Solomons Throne (Halls Buttress) at Damascus Gate, Walls of Jerusalem National Park.*



# Buoyed by Boyd



**Warwick Sprawson follows the Light to Light Walk in Ben Boyd National Park, New South Wales, discovering a diverse coastline and fascinating history**

**THE FRESH PAINT ON GREEN CAPE LIGHTHOUSE** is dazzling in the sun. To the north, rugged coastline juts away into a haze of sea spray, while to the south dense bushland stretches to the Victorian border and beyond. We're heading north on a three-day walk through Ben Boyd National Park to Boyds Tower, a lighthouse-like folly 31 kilometres away. These two structures bookend the walk, giving rise to its name. The Light to Light track is well marked and mostly level, taking in wind-pruned heathlands, dense melaleuca thickets, rainforest, rock platforms, dry eucalypt forest, rocky coves and sandy beaches. And history; a lot of history.

Green Cape Lighthouse was inaugurated in 1883 'in the interests of the vast and increasing trade of these colonies'. Standing on a promontory that juts into the Tasman Sea, it is still an important navigation aid. Although it's now fully automated, it hasn't always been so: for many years three lighthouse keepers worked four-hour shifts to keep the light running throughout the night. When they weren't tending to the beacon, they were repairing equipment, keeping records or attempting to protect their vegetable plots from the strong sea breeze. A lot has changed since then but the view remains the same. Gannets and shearwaters still skim the restless sea, while humpbacks and southern right whales pass by on their way south for the Antarctic summer.

My three companions—Yasmin, Kev and Benita—and I set off through melaleuca and tea-tree thickets to the roar of the sea against

the cliffs. A few hundred metres from the lighthouse we come across more history: a small clearing dotted with whitewashed stones. In 1886 the SS *Ly-ee-moon* struck the reef off Green Cape and broke up. The lighthouse keepers managed to rescue 14 people, but 72 drowned. The stones mark the graves of 24 victims, a reminder that even with a lighthouse, this remains a dangerous coast.

These sombre reflections dissipate as we emerge into bright heathland. Tawny-crowned honeyeaters fossick in banksia cones and pink-flowering boronias carpet the ground. When the track draws close to the cliffs, the heathland's height decreases, reflecting the strength of the winds that often lash this coast.

Occasional markers with a lighthouse-and-tower logo indicate the route until, about two-and-a-half kilometres from Green Cape, we turn toward the coast on a four-wheel-drive track, reaching Pulpit Rock car park after another 700 metres. Steps lead down to the narrow point overlooking a huge, coffin-shaped rock. Fishermen cast into the swell, ignoring the plumes of spray. Taking a seat in the shade of a wind-pruned melaleuca, we eat a snack and watch them pull in fish after fish.

Retracing our steps to the turn-off, we leave the heathland behind and enter taller eucalypt forest before plunging into shady stands of rainforest species such as sweet pittosporum and blue olive-berry. This is to be a common vegetation pattern: the higher, more exposed heathy head-

lands changing to taller forest in the more fertile, sheltered gullies. It's this constant variation—and the endless subtleties in between—that prevents the walk from becoming repetitious.

We cross the first of two small streams, a water skink scuttling into the shelter of the sword sedge and king ferns. Near the second stream we encounter a lace monitor lumbering along the path like a dinosaur. It hastens (slowly) to a gum tree and uses its long, curved claws to haul itself up the trunk, its wrinkled grey skin patterned with yellow spots and bands like a Dreamtime painting. Only when it climbs higher can we appreciate its size: nearly two metres from tip to tail.

Seven kilometres from the lighthouse, we arrive at Bittangabee Bay. The car-accessible campsite on its southern side is busy with post-Christmas holidaymakers. We pause just long enough to fill our water bottles from one of the two rainwater tanks.

More history: from 1880 to 1927 supplies for the lighthouse, including materials for its construction, were landed at Bittangabee Bay. The lighthouse keepers then transported them to Green Cape on a horse-drawn tramway through the bush. The concrete shell of the storehouse is near the camping ground.

Edging further around the long, narrow bay, we cross a pitted, purple-red rock platform to reach a small, sandy cove—the perfect place for a reviving swim. Bobbing in the water, floating on her back, Yasmin points. 'Look', she says. A pair of white-bellied sea eagles have set their wings to the breeze, patrolling the northern side of the bay in effortless sweeps.

Refreshed, we continue through tall, open forest around the bay. We pass the stone foundations of a homestead, one of the many aborted attempts to settle this wild area. Crossing Bittangabee Creek with its natural stone weir and swimming hole, we enter manna gum forest ringing with bird calls. As we cross another heathy headland, we can see back to the cruising sea eagles and beyond to the surprisingly distant lighthouse.

We follow a wide rock platform along the coast until a small cairn marks our return to dense melaleuca and she-oak. The track climbs and narrows before descending through low heathland to Hegarty's Bay, our campsite for the night. The sloping, grassy campsites (marked with a sign, without facilities) are among the melaleuca a little past the bay, 11.5 kilometres from Green Cape Lighthouse. The ferocity and abundance of mosquitoes forces an early night. We sleep to the sound of waves surging into the rocky bay.

In the morning Kev looks very pleased with his knee-high, green-and-red Victoria Bitter socks, which are shown off nicely by his shorts.

## The walk at a glance

<b>Grade</b>	Easy-moderate
<b>Length</b>	Three days
<b>Distance</b>	31 kilometres
<b>Camping</b>	Fees apply at Bittangabee Bay and Saltwater Creek, and bookings are required in the holidays. Call the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service Discovery Centre at Merimbula on (02) 6495 5000
<b>Type</b>	Diverse coastal walk taking in wind-pruned heathlands, dense melaleuca thickets, rainforest, rock platforms, dry eucalypt forest, rocky coves and sandy beaches
<b>Region</b>	South coast of NSW
<b>Start, finish</b>	Green Cape Lighthouse, Boyds Tower
<b>Access</b>	Easiest access is with a car shuttle, leaving one car at Green Cape and another at Boyds Tower. There is a fee of seven dollars per vehicle per day. Eden Taxi [(02) 6495 1180] can pick walkers up from Green Cape or Boyds Tower if given advance notice: \$160 for weekdays or \$180 on weekends
<b>Map</b>	The Kiah 1:25 000 Department of Lands map shows most of the walk. The NSW NPWS Light to Light Walk pamphlet contains a basic map and some useful information: phone the Merimbula office
<b>Best time</b>	The wildflowers are best in spring
<b>Special points</b>	The rainwater tanks at Bittangabee Bay and Saltwater Creek sometimes run dry and there aren't any facilities at Hegarty's Bay or Mowary Point: make sure you have enough water. There are ticks in this area so bring tweezers, and carry mosquito repellent! Heathland sections are very exposed.

**Left**, new growth emerging from beneath burnt hakeas. **Top right**, a lace monitor waits to be left alone. **Bottom right**, the Green Cape Lighthouse.

All photos by the author



We follow as he strides through the melaleuca to a rock platform, which leads to a small beach of tiny, colourful shells. About a kilometre from Hegarty's Bay we enter burnt heathland. Vibrant new growth rises from beneath the black skeletons of hakeas. New sedges and lomandras burst from the scorched earth among a profusion of small wildflowers: fringe lilies, hyacinth orchids, bluebells, everlasting and daisies. Kangaroos and swamp wallabies browse the new growth, watching us pass. The burnt area stretches for about three kilometres until we descend into brown stringybarks near Saltwater Creek.

Leaving the forest, we walk on to a broad crescent of beach. Surfers paddle out through small waves and fishermen stand on the rocks. At the northern end of the beach (17.5 kilometres from Green Cape Lighthouse) is Saltwater Creek, another popular campsite accessible by car and a chance to replenish water supplies from rain-water tanks.

The track continues on the north side of Saltwater Creek through a disturbed area of former farmland. About a kilometre from the campsite we emerge on to another broad, purple rock platform beside the heaving sea. After a few hundred metres we climb back through chest-high melaleuca to heathland dotted with gnarled old saw banksias, their bark like crusted lava. Three kilometres later there is yet another rock platform beside the sea, this one flat and covered with fragments of reddish rock like a scoria trenchment.

Rocks are a feature along the track and the source of some excitement for geologists. They include a type known as 'Devonian', laid down between 410 and 345 million years ago—among the oldest in south-east Australia. But it's the rocks' variety, shape and colour that will interest most walkers: immense tongues, folded and twisted through the aeons, pitted and worn by the elements, shattered and fissured like clumps of dried mud.

We eat lunch on one such rock platform, looking over the white caps to Mowary Point, a rocky headland about a kilometre ahead. Key discovers a tick, which leads to a bout of self-inspection, in which we discover four more. (However, during the rest of the trip we only find another two.)

Continuing along the shore, over smooth, orange-lichen-covered rocks, we soon turn inland and over another heathy headland before entering more melaleuca. Near Mowary Point we look past sloping tongues of reddish rock to see Boyd's Tower in the distance guarding the headland like a medieval fort. 'Dolphins!' cries Benita, and a moment later we see a pod darting and leaping in the surf just off the coast. They seem to circle and leap for the sheer joy of it, and we watch them until they sheer off and out of sight to the south.

The track soon enters old farmland where red-necked wallabies enjoy the sea views from green, sloping paddocks. We have been looking for a sign for the Mowary Point campsite; being well past the point we conclude that we have missed it. Knowing that the official campsite doesn't have facilities, we decide to camp in the paddocks where we can at least enjoy a view and a breeze to keep the mosquitoes at bay (it doesn't). We pitch our tents in the lee of some windswept shrubs overlooking a long finger of rock pointing out to sea.

We have only walked 11.5 kilometres, so there is still plenty of time for exploring. Walking through a nearby grove of coast banksias, yellow-tailed black cockatoos cawing and flapping nervously at a white-bellied sea eagle overhead, we discover a private paradise: a small, sheltered, sandy beach. It is the perfect place to while away the afternoon lying on the warm sand. We watch a

tinuous straight ahead, descending to cross another creek before climbing steeply through open forest with a dense undergrowth of sedges and shrubs. The track then descends through drier box forest, the sound of surf growing until we reach Leather Jacket Bay.

The bay is rough and rocky, its smooth boulders daubed neon orange by lichen. It's beautiful



seal just offshore, circling and diving, occasionally raising a flipper in a lazy wave. After dinner, as the sun sets in the forested hills, we play charades. Benita's impression of a submarine has us laughing so hard we scare the wallabies.

Our final day begins with drizzle. We find the track at the edge of the grassy area, the markers partly obscured by kunzea regrowth. Kangaroos graze in the open areas, straightening but continuing to chew as we walk by. At the western edge of the former farmland is a sign marking Mowary Point even though the point is one-and-a-half kilometres further east. Shortly after entering the open, dry eucalypt forest, we pass a faint track leading down to a small beach. (The rangers later tell us that this is the 'official' Mowary Point campsite—apparently a great place to stay).

We soon cross a creek, the track turning inland before climbing to the Mowary Point parking area. We head along a four-wheel-drive track lined with large manna gums and she-oaks towards Leather Jacket Bay, climbing the only hills of the walk. We ignore the unmarked track on our right (which ends at the coast) and con-

but unsuitable for swimming, so we have a dip in a small, sandy inlet instead. There's a potential campsite in a grassy clearing among the sweet pittosporum and banksia, but no other facilities.

The track continues on the north side of the inlet (now foot-traffic only; look for the marker). It winds through lovely mixed forest just behind the coast, with butterflies flitting through beams of sunshine. About a kilometre from Leather Jacket Bay we re-enter the heath, coming to a T-intersection with a four-wheel-drive track after 500 metres. Turning left, we follow markers through several turns until the track resumes its route parallel to the coast, offering occasional views of Boyd's Tower still blue and hazy in the distance.

Steps lead to a dry riverbed beside a rocky cove. The track continues on the other side of the river, lined with pale-flowering westringia shrubs, although it's slightly indistinct. We cross a second cove on pitted red rock platforms, forming a striking contrast against the grey-blue sea. The track continues along the cliff, skirting the coastline, passing over a large midden studded with shells



*'Dolphins!' cries Benita, and a moment later we see a pod darting and leaping in the surf just off the coast. They seem to circle and leap for the sheer joy of it...*

**Clockwise from below,** Kev in the former lighthouse store at Bittangabee Bay. Crossing weathered boulders south of Mowary Point. A coastal platform near Hegarty's Bay.



and bones. In a wispy tangle of melaleuca, the sunlight reaches the ground in liquid pools. Then we enter taller forest again, the ground scattered with hyacinth orchids and banksia-cone fragments from the yellow-tailed black cockatoos above.

And then, suddenly, there are stairs leading up to Boyd Tower car park: the walk's end is another 300 metres towards the coast along a sealed track. Signs inform us that Benjamin Boyd was a Scottish entrepreneur who arrived in NSW in 1842 determined to create an empire. Armed with little more than determination, he quickly became one of the largest landowners in the colony. With business interests expanding into whaling and shipping, he planned the tower as a private lighthouse, beginning work in 1846. Never one to do things by halves, he had sand-

stone shipped from Sydney and hired a team of skilled masons to craft the 23 metre structure, carving his name in giant letters on all four sides. His plan for a lighthouse was refused by the authorities, but he adapted the tower so it became a whale-spotting platform, giving his whalers an advantage over their competitors. By 1849 Boyd's fortunes had waned and he abandoned his Australian interests to try his luck on the Californian goldfields.

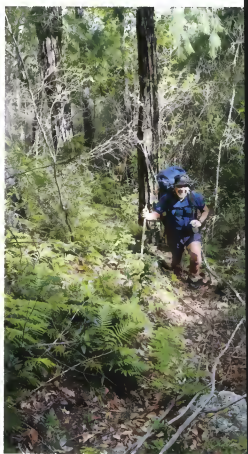
We touch the tower's gritty, pinkish stone, feeling the pock-marks made by chisels, then walk a short distance to look back along the wild coast. Whatever became of Boyd, he couldn't have wished for a better legacy. 📍

Warwick Sprawson resides in the city, but lives in the country. He's currently raising two chickens and working on a book on Tasmania.



# Mt May to Mt Maroon

Gary Tischer outlines this great two-day walk in south-east Queensland



## The walk at a glance

Grade	Medium
Length	Two days
Distance	16 kilometres
Type	Rocky, dry slopes, forested ridges, orchid-filled gullies, slabby creeks and fabulous forest views
Region	South-east Queensland
Nearest towns	Rathdowney
Start, finish	Mt May reserve on Waterfall Road, base of Mt Maroon at end of Cotswold Road
Maps	Sunmap's Maroon 1:25 000 topographical map
Best time	March to November
Special	You may need to carry water for the entire two-day walk, fuel-stoves only; great wildflowers in spring

From left to right, surveying the hidden waterfall near the start of the walk. John Granat enjoying lush forest while walking up the creek on the western side of Mt Maroon. The 30 metre waterfall at the end of Paddys Gully. The spectacular northern cliffline of Mt Maroon. All photos by the author



**ROCKY DRY SLOPES, ORCHID-FILLED GULLIES, SLABBY CREEKS AND FAB-**ulous views: this two-day walk provides great variety while passing through an area ventured into by few walkers. Even the beginning of the walk has some surprises in store as you can visit a hidden waterhole.

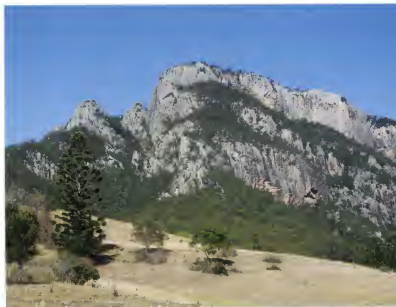
Less than two hours' drive south of Brisbane, Mt Barney National Park is one of the largest areas of undisturbed natural vegetation in south-east Queensland and there are numerous walking opportunities. A climb to Mt Maroon's 967 metre peak is a favourite day walk. Steep ridges pass 250 metre cliffs on the way to the broad summit, which allows unsurpassed views of its rugged southern neighbour Mt Barney. Six kilometres to the west of Mt Maroon, Mt May's double peaks rise above Paddys Plain. These peaks are part of the Scenic Rim, beginning at the coast at Point Lookout and continuing round to Cunninghams Gap.

### When to go

This walk can be done at any time of the year. Autumn is ideal as the weather is cooler and there should be water at the Paddys Plain campsite. Spring is also a great time to go as Mt Maroon is known for its wildflowers, particularly orchids. Winter nights are cold but the days are clear and sunny—good walking weather—while it may be a hot, humid walk in summer.

### Safety/warnings

Water is normally available at the Paddys Plain campsite. However, there are times when it is dry and you may have to carry two days' water. Before doing this walk, you can monitor the area's rainfall using the Bureau of Meteorology web site ([www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au)) or by calling the Queensland Parks & Wildlife Services ranger at Boonah [(07) 5463 5041]. The track down Mt Maroon is quite eroded, so care is needed to prevent dislodging loose rocks.



### Access

From Brisbane, follow the Mt Lindesay Highway through Beaudesert to Rathdowney. A few hundred metres south of Rathdowney, turn right on to the Boonah—Rathdowney Road and travel 16 kilometres to the Cotswold Road turn-off. Turn left and follow this dirt road for about two kilometres. As this is a one-way walk, a car shuttle will normally be required. Leave one vehicle at the end of Cotswold Road (GR 745810) and the other at the Mt May reserve on Waterfall Road (GR 675799). To get to Waterfall Road, return along Cotswold Road to the Boonah—Rathdowney Road intersection and turn left, following this for three kilometres before turning left into Newman Road. Continue for five kilometres and turn left into Waterfall Road. Mt May reserve is one kilometre further on.

### The walk

Before beginning the walk, it is worth taking a short detour up Waterfall Creek from where it crosses the road at the causeway. There is an impressive little gorge that ends in a waterfall and a large pool. It is unusual to see the waterfall running but it is still a spectacular sight.



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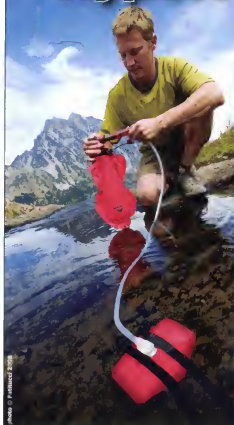


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To begin the walk proper, you need to climb the ridge on the eastern side of the road, immediately to the north of the causeway where the road crosses Waterfall Creek. An unmarked track leads up the ridge on Mt May's northern flanks. This is rocky and unrelenting, climbing 400 vertical metres in a kilometre. After easily climbing around a small rocky cliff, a shaded, level section of the main Mt May spur is reached.

From this point the walk continues east along the ridge. However, it is worth dropping the packs and climbing the 130 vertical metres to the northern summit of Mt May. There are great views from the top, including to the peak's southern summit. This can be reached but some scrambling may be required: it is 50 metres higher but requires a 70 metre descent to the saddle before a climb of another 120 metres.

After returning to the packs, the walking becomes easier as you travel east along the undulating ridge. The ridge divides into two—one heading north and the other south. Take the southern ridge to Paddys Peak, enjoying the great views of the deepening gorge between the two peaks of Mt May, and the Mt Barney massif to the south. The ridge drops steeply on either side and there are numerous rocky outcrops to negotiate, but these are easily climbed over or around. It is worth noting the view of the western side of Mt Maroon and the creek that snakes up through the otherwise dense forest and scrub patches to near the summit: this is the route for tomorrow's walk.

A small cairn on the track marks the summit of Paddys Peak (546 metres) but views are limited. Up to this point the faint track along the ridgeline is reasonably easy to follow, but heading down from Paddys Peak will require more navigational skill. Head north-east down the edge of some scree slopes, avoiding the dense scrub on either side. Be careful not to drop too far down into the gully that runs north as it is best to cross the saddle (GR 704776) between Paddys Peak and spot height 489. From the saddle, follow a north-east bearing, then drop into Paddys Gully. A fire track runs parallel to the gully. Cross the fire track and continue on the same bearing for another 130 metres to reach the creek. The Paddys Plain campsite (GR 71 783) is about 150 metres upstream. (An alternative route to the campsite is to turn left on the fire track for about 70 metres, then turn right at a patch of lantern and follow a track to the grassy area which is perfect for camping.) There is normally water in the creek, but if it hasn't rained for some time it may be worth carrying enough water for the whole walk.

### Day two

Before heading up Mt Maroon, there is a worthwhile side trip down Paddys Gully to a spectacular 30 metre waterfall. Again, this will not normally have a lot of water flowing over it, but the view is great in the early morning light. From the campsite, follow the fire track south for a little more than a kilometre until it ends at the top of the falls.

To get to Mt Maroon from the campsite, walk upstream, initially travelling north before

the creek turns towards the east. It is very pleasant walking, up gently sloping slabs of rock that line the creek as it flows down the forested western slopes of Mt Maroon. There is a creek junction (GR 75787) 600 metres upstream from the campsite; take the right-hand branch which will take you almost all the way to the summit.

As you climb higher, open slabs provide excellent views over Paddys Plain and beyond. There are a couple of sections that are too steep to climb over, but these are easily climbed around—there is a faint track visible on the slopes next to the creek. As the gully narrows and steepens, ignore the temptation to climb out of the gully: walking is more difficult and less enjoyable on the ridges surrounding this pretty creek.

The vegetation becomes more lush as you climb higher, with bracken, moss and even orchids growing on the large boulders. At about the 700 metre contour, a large rock face rises out of the creek to your left. This has a multitude of orchids growing on it—stunning when flowering. Continue up until the rock face peters out. The track climbs to the left while the creek line appears to continue straight ahead. After ten metres, you will discover that you are still with the main creek as it narrows and winds between rocky outcrops.

At this point, about 700 metres of walking through the narrow gully remain before you come out on the drier upper slopes of Mt Maroon. Listen for all the birds that live in the surrounding forest. As you get closer to the main track, you may hear day walkers on their way to the summit. Turn south on the main track and walk the final few hundred metres to the Mt Maroon's summit cairn. This is one of the most satisfying views in south-east Queensland, taking in the Lamington Plateau to the east, Mt Lindesay and Mt Barney to the south, while the rest of the Scenic Rim stretches round to the west.

The walk down from Mt Maroon is not without challenges. From the summit it is a straightforward walk down slabs, then along a clear track to the top of a steep gully (GR 735799). The track down this gully has been badly eroded and care needs to be taken while descending the steep 130 metres before the track begins contouring around the ridge. As you descend, look up at the 250 metre cliff towering above you. Rockclimbers may be spotted on the classic climb Ruby of India.

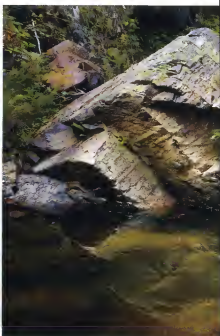
At the bottom of the steep gully, the track contours around to the right. Not far along here there was a large rockfall across the path of the original track. The track now ascends the ridge 30 metres before descending again to a great lookout from where you can see much of the eastern face of Mt Maroon. This is a great place to have a break, take in the view and enjoy a cooling breeze. From here, it is not far down the steep ridge to the Cotswold parking area. Perhaps the dried up dam here has returned to life by the time you take this thoroughly enjoyable walk. ☺

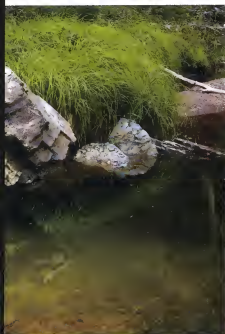
Gary Tischer has spent many years bush walking, cross-country skiing and, more recently, sea kayaking in the pursuit of adventure. These activities have taken him and his trusty cameras to some wonderful and remote parts of the world.



# Buchan *wilderness walk*

Rob Kettels outlines this spectacular ridge and river walk in eastern Victoria





**IN THE SHADOW OF THE COBBERAS** MOUNTAINS lies the isolated Buchan Headwaters Wilderness Zone. It is a maze of rugged spurs and hidden valleys descending towards the Buchan River. The area is remote and exposed to weather extremes. Bushwalkers have just about abandoned this area, which is surprising as it is a particularly beautiful corner of the Alpine National Park.

This walk follows two distinctive features, each with its own character. The trackless spur is steep and at times difficult. Careful navigation is required until it opens up to become one of the finest spur walks in Victoria, reaching the river 780 metres below the evocatively named Mt Seldom Seen. In contrast, the river is peaceful, encouraging a slow pace. It reveals its secrets slowly, but you will discover searing, 100 metre high cliffs and soft, sandy beaches to camp on. Wildlife is also common, from the metre long Gippsland water dragons that scamper across rocky bluffs to the swamp wallabies surprised on the river bank.

Above all, the walk is about the soothing spirit of the river, which contrasts with the surrounding landscape—unforgiving and uniquely Australian. Remnants from floods hang in the trees, up to three metres above the water level, while vast areas were scorched by the 2003 fires. This is nature on its own terms, in one of Victoria's most remote areas.

### When to go

This is a summer walk, best done between November and April. The sun warms the river rocks which in turn warm the water, making it a pleasant wade. Avoid the bitter cold of winter with its additional risk of floods.

### Safety/warnings

Although the walk is only moderate in difficulty, it goes through remote, geographically complex country and does not follow a track. You need to be self-reliant and experienced in navigation. A GPS might not work in some of the deep gorges, so map and compass skills are mandatory. Consider taking an emergency beacon.

In heavy rain, camp near an easy escape route in case of flooding. There is a risk of bushfires in summer: in an emergency a CB radio may allow you to contact the fire lookout station. However, talk to the fire warden before relying on this method. Keep an eye out for red-bellied black snakes (they are generally not an aggressive species).

### Access

From Melbourne, follow the Princes Highway to Bairnsdale, then head inland through Bruthen to Buchan. Alternatively, continue along the Princes Highway past Lakes Entrance to Nowa Nowa, turn left and follow the signs to Buchan. Continue for approximately 45 kilometres to the Seldom Seen Track and turn left (the road is suitable for two-wheel-drive vehicles) to arrive at the Mt Seldom Seen fire tower. Park away from the fire tower; there is a small flat area suitable for a car.

From Canberra, drive to Jindabyne via Cooma, then follow the Barry Way—Snowy River Road to the Seldom Seem Track.

### The walk

At 1347 metres, Mt Seldom Seen is the local high point and it's an airy place; to the north are the Cobberas and below is the vast Buchan Wilderness. It looks like an unmade bed, its

Clockwise from bottom left, peaceful wading along the Buchan River. Gippsland water dragons sitting beside the river. The river has many beautiful aspects. One of many crossings of the river. All photos by the author

## The walk at a glance

Grade	Moderate
Length	Three–four days
Distance	40 kilometres
Type	Rugged mountain walking and easy river wading
Region	East Gippsland, Victoria
Nearest towns	Seldom Seen (petrol), Buchan (nearest big town)
Start, finish	Fire tower on Mt Seldom Seen
Maps	The Deception—Deddic 1:50 000 Vicmap is an excellent map for navigation in the area. The Hema East Gippsland 1:300 000 map gives a good overview but is not suitable for navigation
Best time	November–April
Special points	This is a cool, temperate part of Victoria, so take warm clothing and a waterproof jacket. Carry lightweight runners or sandals for the river as well as sturdy walking boots

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folds intertwining to form complex systems of valleys and spurs. The mountain drops away steeply to the west in what is, at first, a daunting sight. But to the north, just beyond the fire tower, a spur leads down to the Buchanan River. On the Deception–Deddick 1:50 000 map there is an administrative boundary line (marked only on the map): follow that bearing from the fire tower northwards for 800 metres across a broad and scrubby saddle. The area is overgrown but

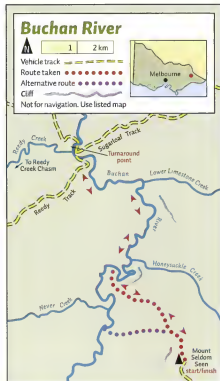
opens up further down and is worth the initial effort. The administrative boundary line then branches west and east.

Take the west line on a bearing of  $302^\circ$  and bush bash along the broad ridge, scrambling easily over rocks. After some 300 metres, the ridge divides into two spurs at 1200 metres elevation. The shorter, westerly option is steeper and follows the administrative boundary line but requires scrambling on dangerous, rotten

limestone cliffs. Your hardest decision is choosing a bend or deep waterhole that will make the best lunch stop. Keep wandering upstream until you reach the junction of Sugarloaf Track, Reedy Track and Reedy Creek. Depending on your pace, either continue along the Buchanan or find a place to camp—agreeing on the perfect spot could be more difficult than you expect. If you have a couple of extra days to explore, slog up Reedy Creek to Reedy Creek Chasm.



Jenni Calzini at the top of the long spur on the journey out of the Buchanan valley back up to Mt Seldom Seen.



rock. The longer north-westerly spur is the pick of the two and provides some wonderful views on the way down. It sweeps around to the north of point 568 (marked on the map), initially heading due north before arcing around to the west. At 1000 metres elevation, ensure that you stay on the westerly spur, following a bearing of  $304^\circ$ , weaving your way through eucalypts and rocks. The regrowth is left behind as you descend and it becomes a delightful walk with glimpses of neighbouring spurs. Stick to the spur's high point and it will take you down to the river.

I loved the spur, but my companion found it relentless. Whatever your opinion, the mood of this bushwalk changes at the river, becoming more relaxed. It also ceases to be a bushwalk and becomes a wade. Change into river shoes and wade upstream until you feel like camping. Find a suitable sandy beach, then have a swim or enjoy a nip of Scotch.

### Day two

Wake to the sounds of the river, pack up camp and continue upstream. Unless you are heading up to Reedy Creek Chasm there is no need to rush, so let nature slowly reveal itself. Immerse yourself in the bends and rocky bluffs that drop vertically into the water, keeping an eye out for the Gippsland water dragon. Enjoy walking along the riverbed among colourful rocks of pink and blue hues, peering up at massive orange-pink

### Day three

Retrace your steps downstream, past the features that are now old friends. Take a skinny-dip in your favourite waterhole and have lunch at the most aesthetic sandy beach. As the spur draws near, so too does the knowledge that it is the closest route to civilisation. When you eventually reach the base of the spur, carefully determine the best ascent point in preparation for the following morning. Camp by the river.

### Day four

It's time to put your walking boots back on and say goodbye to the river. Scale the spur at its easiest point, sticking to the high point of the ridge. The views out across the Buchanan Wilderness should now be familiar instead of daunting. Continue up the 780 metre ascent to Mt Seldom Seen and let the fire warden know you are safe. Back at your car, you may feel as if you have just exited a lost world, and in some ways you have.

### Route extension

An extension to Reedy Creek Chasm is possible—allow an additional two to three days of exploratory style bush bashing. 🏠

Rob Kettels has bushwalked since the age of ten. He now climbs big mountains around the globe but considers it high-altitude bushwalking, and reckons that the smell of eucalyptus trees can't be beaten.



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# The shadow

## The fight to save Victoria's rarest rock wallaby

**FLIGHTY, SMALL AND INCREDIBLY SHY, THE VICTORIAN family of the brush-tailed rock wallaby is precariously clinging to survival.**

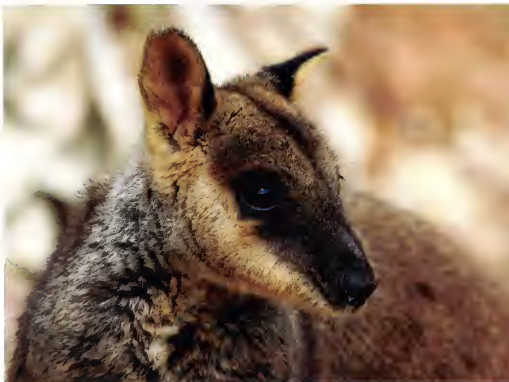
Once common throughout the Grampians in western Victoria and in bushland in the north-east of the state, brush-tailed rock wallabies have fallen victim to hunting and predation by foxes and feral cats. In 1999 the last female was removed from the Grampians for her own safety. Her unique and highly valued genes formed part of a captive breeding program aimed at increasing the number of 'brushies'. At that time there were less than ten brushies remaining in the wild. Today, only around 55 Victorian brushies exist.

The captive breeding program is the last hope for their kind. Its success has been contingent upon ground-breaking research and cross-fostering techniques in which pouch young are transferred to a surrogate mother, either a Tammar wallaby or a yellow-footed rock wallaby, leaving the female brushie free to breed again. This technique has encouraged females that are normally annual breeders to produce up to eight young in a year. Once mature, the young are then taken to a hardening-off enclosure at Dunkeld in the southern Grampians, where they are left to get used to their new surroundings. Meanwhile, over the last nine years a multi-pronged eradication program to rid the Grampians of feral foxes has been under way, using a combination of sand pads, baiting, trapping and shooting. One of the end goals of this project was to secure the landscape from predators before the release of captive-bred brushies back into the mountains.

The brush-tailed rock wallaby has been dubbed 'the shadow' due to its secretive nature. Female wallabies creep into the smallest imaginable crevasses to rear their young. Under normal circumstances mothers would leave their young in dens to go in search of food. After extreme bushfires such as those that tore through the Grampians in 2006, females have had to go further to find food, leaving young wallabies alone and vulnerable to predation in their dens.

Climbing the rugged cliff-edges on both sides of Moora Moora Gorge, the release site for radio-tracked animals, program coordinator Mike Stevens showed me ancient den sites still marked with oil from the generations of wallabies that have used them. A site where intense effort has been made to eradicate foxes and rehabilitate habitat, Moora Moora was chosen for its abundance of safe havens, adequate food and the sustainable water supply provided by a fast-flowing stream that cascades over rocks. If there is ever going to be nirvana for brushies, this is it.

In November 2008, after almost a decade of tireless work by dedicated professionals in the Victorian Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby Recovery Team, ten brushies from the program—including one female with pouch young—were released



The brush-tailed rock wallaby in its element, its distinctive 'brush' tail obvious. **Top**, cute as a button; another distinctive feature of the brushie is the cream-coloured fur running from nose to ear. *Inger Vandyke*

at Moora Moora with radio trackers, effectively doubling the wild population. Work on the program is far from over but it is hoped that a successful brushie reintroduction program, combined with feral fox eradication, will also yield benefits for a number of other threatened species in the Grampians, such as the long-nosed potoroo and southern brown bandicoot.

With careful planning and the continued success of the breeding program, future generations of bushwalkers and climbers may once again

watch 'the shadow' reign over the rocky domes of the Grampians.

More information on the brush-tailed rock wallaby project can be found at [www.vicrockwallaby.com](http://www.vicrockwallaby.com). Conservation Volunteers Australia coordinates groups of 'voluntourists' to participate in the small-mammal monitoring project in the Grampians. Further information on how you can help can be found at [www.conservationvolunteers.com.au/volunteer/grampians.htm](http://www.conservationvolunteers.com.au/volunteer/grampians.htm) 

*Inger Vandyke*

# It's a marvelous night for a moondance...

The Moondance 1 and 2 are the latest additions to Mont's specialist lightweight tent range. Impressively light, they feature the latest in high tech materials, sturdy tub floors and the sort of attention to detail Mont is renowned for. Mont tents are durable, comfortable, easy to pitch and are built from the ground up to perform in the Australian wilderness.

## Moondance 1

At just 1.6kg, the Moondance 1 is the ultimate fast and light minimalist tent. It features a robust floor and good ventilation and is sure to become a favourite with the solo walker, adventure racer or cycle tourist.

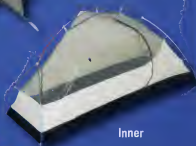
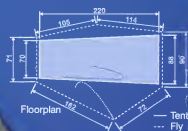
### Specifications:

Capacity	1 Person
Packed Weight	1.59 kg
Minimum Weight	1.47 kg
Footprint Weight	170 g
Floor Area	1.76m <sup>2</sup>

\* Minimum weight includes inner, fly, poles and 2 x pegs only.



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## Moondance 2

This 2-person ultra-light tent is an excellent choice if weight and bulk are your primary considerations. At just under 2 kg's it's the perfect tent for adventure racing teams and lightweight dreams, it's a marvellous night for a Moondance.

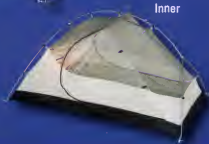
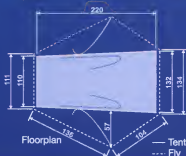
### Specifications:

Capacity	2 Person
Packed Weight	1.98 kg
Minimum Weight	1.86 kg
Footprint Weight	180g
Floor Area	2.86m <sup>2</sup>

\* Minimum weight includes inner, fly, poles and 2 x pegs only.



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# No ordinary day

Phil Ingamells reflects on the consequences of Victoria's devastating fires

I was in my car briefly on 'Black Saturday' (7 February), but there were so many plane-tree leaves flying through the air that I couldn't drive safely. This wasn't autumn; it was a summer day the likes of which I had never seen. A record 47°C and a raging northerly wind generated a firestorm north-east of Melbourne, killing nearly 200 people, levelling thousands of homes and carving a hellish swathe through farmland and forest alike.

In Victoria's north and east, several major fires burnt through approximately 350 000 hectares over a couple of fierce weeks. But terrifying though these bushfires were, they were not unprecedented. Victoria's fiercest known fire was the drought-induced Black Thursday inferno of 1851, which incinerated around five million hectares. According to one paper of the day: 'A total darkness overspread the whole of Gippsland, and literally changed day into night...Settlers were obliged to feel their way from their outhouses to their huts.' There are accounts of the sun darkening in Tasmania, and of a ship in Bass Strait battling embers flying across the water.

What is most remarkable about this year's fires is that they are the most recent in a series of very large fires in the state during the last decade. Indeed, claims made at the turn of the 21st century that the Victorian landscape was seriously underburnt no longer have any credibility. There is almost certainly no time in recorded history when so much of Victoria's bush has burnt in such a short period of time.

It might be too early to decide unequivocally whether we are in another seasonal drought or experiencing the effects of climate change. But this year's fires do match the now familiar predictions that southern regions of Australia will suffer fires of increasing frequency and severity.

Basically, the El Niño/La Niña phenomenon that brings cyclical droughts to much of Australia isn't the driving force south of the divide in Victoria. Instead, a ring of cold fronts that rotate clockwise around the Antarctic bring rain here. Climate change seems to be taking these fronts (and their accompanying rain) slowly southwards towards the Pole. Victoria is getting drier, particularly in winter, and this will worsen over time.

Where does that leave us? Well, for one thing, the bush we love is increasingly being seen as simply 'fuel' for the next inferno, with many people regarding the land as something to fear. There is truth in that way of seeing the landscape—nature should be treated with respect, and at times it isn't a safe place to wander. But it's not the only truth, and it's not a view of the world based on good understanding.

Aboriginal people have always treated nature with a respect born of both love and fear. They see a working relationship with the natural world and knowledge of it as fundamental to a person's journey. If we are to make sense of living with the bush, particularly as it faces climate



Burnt forest in the Bunyip State Park. Photo supplied by the Department of Sustainability and Environment

change impacts, we will have to get to know it an awful lot better.

The early attempts of Europeans to understand the Australian bush coincided with a wider explosion of interest in nature that eventually led to Darwin's great leap of understanding. In the early 1830s, Austrian Baron Charles von Huegel found himself in the wilds of south-eastern Australia collecting specimens of our remarkable plants. He was intrigued by the pockets of lilly-pilly, kanooka and other trees that formed deep, shady groves so different to the surrounding eucalypt forests. He bravely pronounced that these moist forests were newer than the ancient-looking Australian bush, and had probably migrated down the coast from the tropics of New Guinea.

Current knowledge has him wrong: the drier, sun-drenched plants of the Australian bush—the eucalypts, hekeas and wattles—are the newer forests, evolved from the ancient Gondwanan rainforests at which he was looking. And the chief agent of this 50-million-year evolution has been fire. Indeed, the evolution of Australia's plants and animals has been so closely linked to repeated fire that many things actually require occasional burns, and almost everything has a way of coping. However, different plants and animals need fire at different times, intervals and intensities. It's a complex situation, and one we are only beginning to comprehend.

Until we understand fire and its relationship to the 100 000 odd species that make up Victoria's natural heritage, mosaic burns are seen as the safest type of management burns. They give animals a chance of refuge, and allow plants, insects and the rest a chance to recolonise burnt areas. However, since Black Saturday there have been calls for radically increased levels of fuel reduction burning, up to ten times the current rate.

Increasing the rate of burning would be almost impossible for purely practical reasons alone. There are few days when you can safely

set fire to an area of bush. Around one per cent of management burns (two or three burns a year) escape, causing a fair bit of havoc; multiplying this by ten would bring chaos. Another factor is that fire crews given mega-hectare burn targets are more likely to head to remote areas where they can set a few thousand hectares alight, rather than do the important, careful burns around townships. Strategic burns take a lot of people and a lot of time, but don't really help to reach large burn targets.

Lastly and most importantly, any approach to fire that sees the bush as just a fuel problem has terrifying implications. We are the guardians of a 500-million-year-old evolutionary heritage that has left us with around 100 000 different species in the surviving natural areas of Victoria. Some of these areas are large and doing relatively well; others are fragmented and weed-infested, inhabited by feral animals or increasingly invaded by humans. They are all now faced with a range of climate impacts, including increased fire and long-term drought. Scientists and ecologists are flagging unprecedented levels of extinctions worldwide, and Victoria will not be exempt.

This presents a challenge like none before. We must get to know the bush a lot better, and our community must rapidly increase our natural area management resources, knowledge and expertise. We have to learn how to live with nature, how to support it against the perils we have brought to bear, and how to respect its capricious and sometimes dangerous moods. It won't be easy, but it is a task worthy of our time on earth.

## Act now

To find out how you can support fire management that doesn't harm the bush, go to the Victorian National Parks Association's web site: [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au)



# Crunch time for the Kimberley

Action is required to protect one of the world's last great wild places,  
by Josh Coates

The Kimberley region of north-west Australia is one of the world's great wilderness regions. Spectacular geology, a harsh tropical climate and vast landscapes have ensured that the Kimberley remains one of the few relatively unspoilt regions left on the planet, comparable to areas like the Amazon and the Antarctic.

As scientific attention and awareness of the Kimberley increases, we are beginning to understand its unique natural values. For example, scientists are finding that the Kimberley marine



bioregion has the most diverse coral in Western Australia, and future research is likely to show that this exceeds even the Great Barrier Reef (GBR). This Kimberley coast is now in the firing line. Major oil and gas corporations and the State and Commonwealth governments want to exploit the massive Browse Basin gas field lying off the Kimberley coast, processing it into liquefied natural gas (LNG) at a coastal site just north of Broome.

In the 1970s, oil and gas mining in the GBR was rejected and the region was made into one of the world's largest marine parks. Sustainable industries such as tourism in the GBR now contribute \$6.9 billion dollars annually to the Australian economy. The Kimberley is equally significant and has the potential to become an international



An aerial shot of Dugong Bay, showing the spectacular northern coastline of the Kimberley. *Richard Costin* Left, a breaching humpback whale in the vicinity of Camden Sound, Kimberley. The Kimberley coast is a crucial nursery area for the largest humpback whale population in the world. *Josh Coates*

icon, but its coastal waters are not protected in marine parks. This is despite the fact that the largest population of humpback whales in the world breed and live off the Kimberley coast. It is feared that the noise and disturbance associated with the proposed LNG pipe construction, port development and maintenance, as well as the greatly increased boat traffic and risk of spills, could interrupt whale migration, calving and breeding patterns.

The WA Government is pressing ahead with plans for a huge industrial hub to process Browse Basin gas and service other industries such as alumina refineries. Despite the triumphant tone of WA Premier Colin Barnett's announcement on 15 April of an 'in principle' deal between State and Federal governments, Woodside and Kimberley Land Council regarding the proposed industrial site, final approval will take many months.

This is not a 'clean' industry: pollutants such as sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide compounds deplete the environment's ozone layer, contribute to global warming and have a serious impact on health, and the proposed industrial precinct would have far-reaching and very damaging impacts on the Kimberley's natural values. The project would require blasting and dredging of reefs, the clearing of significant pindan woodland and sensitive vine thicket communities, and impact heavily on species including hump-

back whales. Ongoing air and marine pollution would also profoundly alter the nature of the Kimberley. The cultural impacts would be significant as the proposed precinct would cut an Indigenous song line, while the huge influx of workers would impact heavily on Broome, tourism and other sustainable industries, and the surrounding environment.

In the next few months, crucial decisions will be made regarding the fate of the Kimberley. These decisions must be made with the future of the natural and cultural values of the region in mind, and resist political pressure from those who would compromise our shared future for the sake of short-term economic gain. Even if Browse gas processing goes ahead, there are less environmentally damaging options—including floating LNG—that need to be considered.

## Act now

Visit [www.wilderness.org.au/kimberley](http://www.wilderness.org.au/kimberley) for further information and opportunities for action. You can support our work, send messages to decision makers, join the groundswell of community outrage and learn about other ways to let your voice be heard in what is becoming one of the most important environmental battles of our times.

# We must **save the Coorong!**

## Peter Owen reports that Australia is failing dismally in its obligation to protect this Ramsar-listed wetland

The health of a river's estuary reflects the overall health of the river system, which is why saving the Coorong is so important. The only way to do this is to address the massive over-allocation of water for irrigation as a matter of urgency. A recent submission by the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists to a Senate Inquiry into the issue states: 'If we are to maintain healthy rivers and provide high quality water to produce food, our analysis suggests that the consumptive use of water across the Murray Darling Basin may have to be cut by between 42 and 53 per cent.'

For decades we have known that the amount of water pumped out of the Basin for irrigation is unsustainable and needs to be reduced. Despite all the talking by successive governments, very little has been done and we are now dealing with an environmental disaster and political embarrassment of international proportions.

The Commonwealth Government has promised billions of dollars to deal with the problem once and for all, a promise welcomed by scientists, environmentalists and irrigators alike. Funding is needed to allow people to exit the irrigation industry with dignity and return much-needed water to the river. Many irrigation communities

want to remain on the land, changing their focus from irrigation to land restoration, stewardship and the provision of ecosystem services. However, as funding for serious water buy-backs continues to be delayed, the idea of flooding the lower reaches of the system with the sea—pushed by powerful irrigation lobby groups for years as a way of expanding the industry—gathers momentum.

This idea is not supported by anyone with credibility; in fact, many suggest that it represents an act of extreme environmental vandalism. Flooding the Lower Lakes with sea water would result in a hyper-saline 'dead sea', which could then move into surrounding groundwater systems and decimate vast natural and agricultural areas. The Wilderness Society (TWS) believes that the lower reaches must not be flooded with salt water unless it is done in conjunction with the release of fresh water from the Murray River into the Lower Lakes. An environmental flow entitlement must be purchased to save the estuary of the Murray–Darling Basin.

The Commonwealth Government has two choices: it can show true leadership by making hard decisions and returning the Murray–Darling Basin to a sustainable situation, or it can talk the talk of previous governments and do nothing. One thing is for certain: the cost of inaction will be disastrous, both environmentally and economically.



The Coorong is a crucial migratory feeding ground for many birds. Kate Elmes

## Act now

Sign the online petition to protect the future of the globally significant Coorong Wetlands at the mouth of the Murray River: <https://secure.wilderness.org.au/cyberactivist/cyberactions/09.03.coorong-cyberaction.php>

## Tassie: the latest

### The Wilderness Society's Vica Bayley reports

At the time of writing, Tasmania's skies are stained with the smoke from dozens of forestry burns, deliberately lit in logged coupes to prepare the ground for eucalypt crops. Not only do these burns damage Tasmania's clean, green and natural appeal, they release millions of tonnes of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, worsening climate change and undermining Australia's ability to cut carbon emissions.

While the young regrowing trees do sequester some carbon, scientific research shows that commercial forests will never reclaim the amount of carbon lost through logging. Despite contrasting claims by Gunns and Forestry Tasmania, native forests continue to be cleared for conversion into monoculture plantations.

Logging in the World Heritage value old-growth forests of the Styx and Upper Florentine has escalated, with new roads bulldozed into areas of forests that are hundreds of years old. Despite long-running community protests and the World Heritage Committee's call for these areas to be investigated for protection, these roads are opening up new areas, sometimes



A forestry burn from 2008 in the Weld Valley, southern Tasmania. Rob Blakers



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within a few hundred metres of the World Heritage Area boundaries.

Threats to Tasmania's wild places continue to develop. Despite overwhelming community opposition and the global financial crisis, Gunns' pulp mill is still a looming threat. At the time of writing, Gunns was claiming it was close to securing finance, was in discussion with a potential joint-venture partner, and that construction could begin at any time. Any joint-venture partner would gain access to Tasmania's forest and water resources through deals signed with Gunns for the pulp mill. There has been vigorous public debate about the potential risks of foreign ownership of Australia's natural resources, with the debate focusing on the mining industry. But this discussion should also include the pulp mill. Giving up ownership of Australian assets will affect future generations' ability to shape their own destiny and make resource decisions based on what is best for them and their children.

### Obituary

**Nature's defender: Jenny Barnett**

In one of nature's perverse gestures, Jenny Barnett spent many years studying the effects of fire on Victoria's ecosystems, before herself falling victim to the firestorm of Victoria's Black Saturday. Jenny began working life as a researcher, soon gravitating to the Victorian Na-



Tireless environmental crusader Jenny Barnett will be missed by many. John Sampson

tional Parks Association (VNPA) where she fought hard for the protection of Victoria's natural areas for some 25 years. Famous for the scrupulous accuracy of her reports and submissions, Jenny was greatly respected and often feared by the government departments, local councils, mining companies and other bodies she challenged. She had an impeccable knowledge of the web of laws and planning regulations that could be applied to nature conservation, but also a broad and often detailed knowledge of Victoria's bush and its remarkable inhabitants. She didn't just know where to find a smoky mouse, a growling grass frog or a ground parrot, she knew what they ate, how they spent their time and, importantly, the threats they faced.

Jenny was a full-time conservationist. Her weekends were often spent on mammal surveys in remote areas of Victoria, and she tended native orchids in her garden at home. She was supported in her work by her husband John (who died with her), and they invariably spent their

holidays checking conservation-management issues around Victoria or visiting natural areas elsewhere in Australia and overseas.

Over the last 20 years, Jenny made countless submissions to Victoria's bushfire management plans and fronted many fire inquiries. She understood and supported the need for appropriate fuel-reduction burns in national parks, but she

was vigilant in her insistence that management burns should, wherever possible, support ecological processes.

Invariably Jenny would turn up to the VNPA in one of the many T-shirts she had hand-painted with native birds or flowers. She literally wore her heart on her sleeve. Jenny's contribution to nature conservation in Victoria is vast, and she

will be sorely missed by her colleagues at the VNPA and all those who knew her.

More than 150 tributes to Jenny have been posted on the VNPA's web site, from where contributions to the Jenny Barnett Tribute Conservation Campaign can be made to allow her work to continue. Go to [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au)

Phil Ingamells

## Woodchips

### Brown Mountain's ancient giants

Jill Redwood from Environment East Gippsland reports that recent radiocarbon dating confirms that an old-growth tree logged on East Gippsland's Brown Mountain was growing before Christopher Columbus sailed to America. Test results show a 68 per cent chance that the tree took root between 1435 and 1490 AD. The shining gum was still healthy and growing when cut down in January, although it was relatively small compared to its neigh-



The nearly 600-year-old shining gum. Jill Redwood. Right, a satellite image showing the areas of Wilsons Promontory affected by fire in charcoal-brown and beige (lightly burnt); red represents unburnt vegetation. NASA

bours. The 12 metre circumference of some nearby trees would make them nearly 800 years old.

This is a significant find and rewrites scientific understanding of the age of our trees. The government should now value and protect all remaining ancient forests, not just as natural relics but also as ancient carbon stores. This tree was cut down in an hour, yet it took over 600 years to grow and store the carbon in its bulk.

In 2006 Victoria's Government promised to protect the last significant stands of old-growth forest. Since then, hundreds of hectares have been logged. The new information shows that these forests need immediate protection and can never be replaced on logging cycles of 50–80 years.

### Wilsons Promontory fire

Phil Ingamells reports that in February large fires started by lightning burnt an estimated 25 000 hectares of Wilsons Promontory National Park. With the heavy loss of life and property around Kinglake and Marysville, it is understandable that already overstretched fire crews did not give this fire high priority. A southerly wind blew the blaze into remote bush behind Five Mile Beach that had not been burnt since



1951. The recent fire is probably a good thing for much of the burnt region as it will bring new life in time. However, in the wilderness area north of Five Mile Road the fire swept through bush that has been burnt repeatedly in recent years; any more blazes in this area could take many plants and animals well beyond their fire tolerance. Over very large areas elsewhere, the fire burnt in patches, leaving a mosaic of unburnt and lightly burnt bits among the more severely impacted areas.

### Central Victorian biolink proposal

Mt Cole and the Pyrenees State Forests are well known to central Victorian bushwalkers. These forests have their own unique ecological vegetation types and wildlife. They are also the originating headwaters for the catchments of four river systems, including the northern-flowing, terminal Avoca and Wimmera River systems, and their health is important to river flows and the downstream environment.

Both forests were heavily logged in the 19th century to provide construction materials for

the goldfield cities of Ballarat and Bendigo, and to fuel the mine boilers. However, many of the rugged gullies have intact vegetation which now allows regeneration and restoration of logged areas. Mt Cole is an important site for populations of brush-tailed phascogales and home to breeding pairs of powerful owls.

The Bendigo & District Environment Council, Wombat Forest Inc and the Ballarat Environment Network are proposing that the existing mosaic of state forest, state parks and bush reserves be managed under a single park-management structure, with infill areas revegetated to form a north-south biolink joining the existing areas of native vegetation. This may in turn be part of a future Greater Grampians/Great Dividing Range Biolink. For further information contact the Ballarat Environment Network: 0438 660 501.

Readers' contributions to this department, including high-resolution digital photos or colour slides, are welcome. Items of less than 200 words are more likely to be published. Send them to Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181 or email [editorial@wild.com.au](mailto:editorial@wild.com.au)



# LET US MAKE THE PERFECT SLEEPING BAG FOR YOU



We have recently acquired 50 kilos of magnificent 840 Loft\* white goose down. This quality down is hard to come by and we would like to offer *Wild* readers the following opportunity. If you would like a sleeping bag that weighs 500 grams with an estimated comfort limit of 4°C or a 1500 grams minus 15°C bag, or anything in between consider the One Planet Custom line.



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\*US test method 840 cuin/oz or EU method 453cm<sup>3</sup>/g

# Trekking *the light fantastic*

John Chapman surveys lightweight trekking packs

## Wild Gear Surveys: what they are and what they're not

The purpose of Wild Gear Surveys is to assist readers in purchasing specialist outdoors equipment of the quality and with the features most appropriate for their needs, and to save them time and money in the process.

The cost of 'objective' and meaningful testing is beyond the means not only of Wild, but of the Australian outdoors industry in general and we are not aware of such testing being regularly carried out by an outdoors magazine anywhere in the world. Similarly, given the number of products involved, field testing is beyond the means of Australia's outdoors industry. Wild Gear Surveys summarise information, collate and present it in a convenient and readily comparable form, with guidelines and advice to assist in the process of wise equipment selection.

Surveyors are selected for their knowledge of the subject and their impartiality. Surveys are checked and verified by an independent referee, and reviewed by Wild's editorial staff. Surveys are based on the items' availability and specifications at the time of the relevant issue's production; ranges and specifications may change later. Before publication each manufacturer/distributor is sent a summary of the surveyor's findings regarding the specifications of their products for verification.

Some aspects of surveys, such as the assessment of value and features—and especially the inclusion/exclusion of certain products—entail a degree of subjective judgement on the part of the surveyor, the referee and Wild, space being a key consideration.

'Value' is based primarily upon price relative to features and quality. A product with more elaborate or specialised features may be rated more highly by someone whose main concern is not price.

An important criterion for inclusion is 'wide availability'. To qualify, a product must usually be stocked by a number of specialist outdoors shops in the central business districts of the major Australian cities. With the recent proliferation of brands and models, and the constant ebb and flow of their availability, 'wide availability' is becoming an increasingly difficult concept to pin down.

Despite these efforts to achieve accuracy, impartiality, comprehensiveness and usefulness, no survey is perfect. Apart from the obvious human elements that may affect assessment, the quality, materials and specifications of any product may vary markedly from batch to batch and even from sample to sample. It is ultimately the responsibility of readers to determine what is best for their particular circumstances and for the use they have in mind for gear reviewed.



The old and the new: a trekker in the Annapurna Conservation Area in Nepal carrying an old-fashioned pack on her back, while a porter readies for take-off with his state-of-the-art fixed-wing flying pack. Simon Neville

**OUTSIDE AUSTRALIA, TREKKING IS THE TRADITIONAL** way to traverse some of the world's most spectacular mountain areas. Trekking differs from bushwalking as it usually follows well-formed tracks without overhanging scrub, so packs are subject to less wear and tear than in the rough Australian bush. Treks often pass through inhabited regions, giving walkers access to villages or mountain huts and reducing the need to carry tents, cooking equipment and food. The best way to trek is with a light load, minimising both the weight and amount of equipment carried. Trekking packs are often a perfect size for overnight adventures closer to home, something which has also been considered.

This survey concentrates on lightweight packs with volumes from 40 to 60 litres, as they are the ideal size for trekking or lightweight

walking and travel. All models are available in specialist outdoor shops in Australia.

## Best suited for

While this survey concentrates on lightweight packs for trekking, many are also ideal for lightweight bushwalking—this rating indicates their suitability for this use. However, it is important to note that this rating assumes adoption of a lightweight walking style and suggests either weekend or extended use (up to five days). A number of packs were originally designed for alpine climbing and feature attachments for ice-tools. They are often also good trekking packs as they are designed to be lightweight and comfortable, and the extra tie points can be handy for other purposes such as tying on washing.

# Trekking packs

	Best suited for	Volume, litres	Weight, grams	Back lengths available	Adjustable back length	Main material	Internal compartments	Harness quality	Air flow to back	Water resistance	Value	Comments	Approx. price, \$
<b>Berghaus</b> China <a href="http://www.berghaus.com">www.berghaus.com</a>													
Cyclops Light 50	W	50	1520	1		N S 1	●●1/2	●●1/2	●●1/2	●●●●		Mesh wand pockets; hydration pouch	200
Women's Verdun 60	E	60 (+10)	2050	1		Y S 1	●●●	●●1/2	●●1/2	●●●1/2		Three pockets; rain cover; daisy chain	220
Sentinel 45	W	45	1700	1		N S 1	●●1/2	●●	●●1/2	●●●		Three pockets	230
<b>Black Diamond</b> China <a href="http://www.bdel.com">www.bdel.com</a>													
Sphinx 42	W	42	1410		S, M-L	N S 1	●●1/2	●●	●●●	●●1/2		Multiple tie points; one pocket	275
Predator 50	W	50	1810		S, M-L	N S 1	●●	●●	●●	●●1/2		Side and top access; one pocket	340
<b>Black Wolf</b> China <a href="http://www.blackwolf.com.au">www.blackwolf.com.au</a>													
Mountain Ash 45†	W	45	2100	1		Y S 2	●●	●●1/2	●●	●●●		Bottom zip; rain cover; hydration port	150
McKinley 55	E	55	2200	1		Y S 2	●●	●●●	●●	●●●		Bottom zip; clam-shell opening; three pockets; hydration port; daisy chain	200
Bugaboo 60	E	60	2500	1		Y S 2	●●1/2	●●●	●●	●●1/2		Bottom zip; rain cover; three pockets; extendible lid	245
<b>Deuter</b> Vietnam <a href="http://www.deuter.com">www.deuter.com</a>													
Futura Pro 42	W	42	1700	1		N S 2	●●	●●●●	●●	●●●1/2		Bottom zip; four pockets	240
Quantum 55	E	55 (+10)	2750	S-L		Y S 2	●●●	●●1/2	●●	●●		Bottom zip; clam-shell opening; two pockets; one removable pocket	310
Air Content 55	E	55 (+10)	2400	S-L		Y S 2	●●●	●●1/2	●●1/2	●●1/2		Bottom zip; three pockets; removable lid	320
<b>Kathmandu</b> Vietnam <a href="http://www.kthmndu.com.au">www.kthmndu.com.au</a>													
Altair	W	40	1280	1		N S 1	●●	●●	●●	●●●1/2		Basic lightweight pick	220
Vanguard v1	E	55-65	2100	S, M, L		Y S 1	●●●	●●●	●●1/2	●●		One removable pocket; removable lid and hip-belt	130
<b>Low Alpine</b> China <a href="http://www.lowalpine.com">www.lowalpine.com</a>													
Attack 45 Hyperlite	W	45	1260	S-L		N S 1	●●1/2	●●1/2	●●1/2	●●●1/2		One pocket; removable lid	200
Horizon 55 Women's	E	55	2200	S-L		Y S 2	●●1/2	●●1/2	●●1/2	●●●		Bottom zip; three pockets; removable lid	260
Contour 60-10	E	60 (+10)	1920	S-L		Y S 2	●●	●●	●●	●●●		Three pockets	280
<b>Macpac</b> Philippines <a href="http://www.mpac.com.ph">www.mpac.com.ph</a>													
Pursuit Classic	E	50-55	1750	W, M, L		N C 1	●●●	●●●	●●●1/2	●●●1/2		Narrow, tall design; haul loops and ice axe attachments	280
Espirit 55	E	55-60	2750	M, L		Y C 2	●●●	●●1/2	●●●	●●		Women's model; bottom zip; trekking pole attachments	450
<b>Mountain Designs</b> Vietnam <a href="http://www.mountaindesigns.com">www.mountaindesigns.com</a>													
Boreas	W	50	1500	M, L		N S 2	●●1/2	●●●1/2	●●1/2	●●●●		Bottom zip; six pockets	220
Edge	E	60-70	2400	M, L		Y S 2	●●●	●●●1/2	●●1/2	●●		Bottom zip; three pockets; stash panel; daisy chain	380
<b>North Face</b> Vietnam <a href="http://www.northface.com">www.northface.com</a>													
Prophet 45	W	40-50	1475	S, M, L		N S 1	●●	●●	●●	●●●		One pocket; removable lid	250
Ligero 50	W	50-55	1450	M, L		N S 1	●●1/2	●●	●●	●●●		Top zip; five pockets	300
Crestone 60	E	55-65	2540	W, S, M, L		Y S 2	●●1/2	●●1/2	●●1/2	●●		Side zip; one pocket; removable lid; daisy chain	400
<b>One Planet</b> Australia <a href="http://www.adventureone.com.au">www.adventureone.com.au</a>													
Frog & Toad	W	40	1400	1		Y S 1	●●1/2	●●●	●●1/2	●●1/2		Clam-shell opening; two pockets; very simple pack	190
Shadow †	W	53-60	1500	S, M, L		Y S 1	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●1/2		Ultra lightweight	280
Stiletto	E	60-65	2840	W, S, M, L		Y C 1	●●●	●●●	●●●●	●●●		Two pockets; stash panel; removable lid	420
<b>Osprey</b> Vietnam <a href="http://www.ospreypacks.com">www.ospreypacks.com</a>													
Kestrel 48	W	46-48	1870	S-L		Y S 1	●●●	●●1/2	●●●	●●●		Four pockets; rain cover; hydration port	220
Atmos/Aura 50	W	50	1380	S, M, L		N S 1	●●1/2	●●●●	●●1/2	●●●		Four pockets; hydration port; Atmos is the men's model; Aura is the women's	270
Aether 60	E	57-63	1710	S, M, L		Y S 1	●●1/2	●●1/2	●●1/2	●●1/2		Four pockets	300
<b>Tatonka</b> Vietnam <a href="http://www.tatonka.com">www.tatonka.com</a>													
Victor 48 †	W	48	2100	1		Y S 2	●●1/2	●●	●●	●●		Side mesh pockets	250
Yukon Light 60 †	E	60	2230	1		Y S 2	●●1/2	●●	●●	●●1/2		Side mesh pockets; bottom zip; removable top	250
Yukon 60	E	60-70	2700	1		Y S 2	●●1/2	●●1/2	●●	●●		Two pockets; removable lid	300
<b>Wilderness Equipment</b> Vietnam <a href="http://www.wildequipment.com.au">www.wildequipment.com.au</a>													
Contour	W	43	1150	1		N C 1	●	●●	●●●●	●●●1/2		One pocket	160
Alpine Express	E	55-65	2500	S, M, L		Y S 1	●●●1/2	●●●	●●●	●●		One pocket; side zip; daisy chain	340
Jagungal	W	43-48	2300	S, M, L		N C 1	●●●	●●1/2	●●●●	●●1/2		One pocket; one flat pocket; daisy chain	370

● poor ●● average ●●● good ●●●● excellent **Best suited for:** Extended walks up to five days, Weekend trips is given; figures in brackets are extra capacity gained by extending the lid **Weights:** for the smallest back length available **Back lengths available:** S-L indicates one adjustable harness ranging from small to large; Large, Medium, Small, Women's size **Main material:** Synthetic, Canvas † not seen by surveyor ‡ not seen by referee **Value:** where more than one size is available, the smallest and largest volume is given; figures in brackets are extra capacity gained by extending the lid **Comments:** the country listed after the manufacturer/brand name is the country in which the products are made

## Volume

This is in litres and provided by manufacturers. It will give you a good indication, but do not take the figures literally as manufacturers use different methods for calculating volume. A size range indicates the volumes available in that model, from smallest to largest. Packs in the 50–60 litre range are generally the best for trekking, but some walkers will manage with a 40 litre model.

## Buy right

- There is a huge range of packs available. Decide on the major features required, such as volume and weight, and use this to narrow down your choices before venturing into the shops
- Try on a number of packs. Trained shop staff should load the pack with weight, then adjust it to your body shape. Test the pack with weights similar to what you intend to carry as comfort can alter dramatically as weight increases.
- Select a pack that has been correctly adjusted and is as comfortable as possible. (Packs are never really comfortable.)
- While there are women-specific models, females should also try regular packs. Every body is slightly different: if you are having problems getting a good fit, it is worth trying the entire range.
- Consider buying a cargo or zip-lock bag that you can put your pack in for air and bus travel. This will provide an extra layer of protection and stop the straps from being caught in machinery, reducing the risk of damage.

## Weight

Supplied by the manufacturer, this is for the smallest size in the range. Trekking packs should ideally be as light as possible, but as with most outdoor equipment, a compromise between weight and longevity is necessary. Lighter packs are great for travelling and trekking but will not last as long as those made from heavier materials.

## Back lengths available and adjustable back length

It is worth finding a well-fitting pack. Unfortunately, a survey cannot indicate which models will fit a particular person—the only way to find out if a pack is comfortable is to test it. Most outdoor shops are happy to help.

Manufacturers recognise that each person is different and provide a variety of harness systems to suit, with some using different systems on different models. The simplest harnesses are fixed or have minimal adjustments. These are generally the lightest as they have less tapes and buckles, and usually come in a num-

ber of sizes. Packs with adjustable back lengths allow the shoulder-straps to be moved without altering the pack's shape. Some models are available in a women's fit: these usually have shorter back lengths, wider hip shapes and altered shoulder-straps.

## Main material

The main materials used in packs are canvas and synthetic. Canvas is a blend of cotton and synthetic yarns, designed to produce a highly water-resistant and hard-wearing material. Synthetic fabric is woven from purely synthetic threads, usually nylon or polyester based, with a waterproof coating then applied. A wide range of synthetic fabrics are used in packs, but it is impossible to separate them in any meaningful way as there are numerous trade names and little information on the composition of these trademarked

## Harness quality

This rating takes into account the type, amount, density and shape of padding used. It cannot assess individual comfort, but rather considers the materials used, adjustments provided, stability, and points of potential wear and failure.

## Air flow to back

In warm, humid environments, all packs will make you sweat. While the difference between most packs is small, even a small gap can increase breathability. This rating considers the potential air flow provided by the harness design.

## Water resistance

None of the packs in this survey are waterproof. This rating is based on the material used, the placement of seams (horizontal seams leak more) and zip openings. All packs can be made more water-resistant by using a pack cover. (If a pack cover is a permanent part of the pack, this has been taken into account in the rating.)

## Value

This is a subjective assessment that places equal emphasis on weight, volume and price. This initial rating was then adjusted according to quality of manufacture, harness and air flow to the back.

## Comments

All the surveyed packs are top loading, except One Planet's Frog & Toad. All dual-compartment packs have a top-loading entrance and a curved zip-opening into the lower compartment. Some also have a clam-shell zip-opening (similar to a travel pack) or a vertical zip into the main or top compartment. 🐸

## Other brands available

Brand	Distributor	Contact
High Country	Aussie Disposals	(03) 9799 8888
Mitchells	Mitchell's Adventure	(03) 9670 8550
Mont	Mont Adventure Equipment	(02) 6162 0900
Mountain Hardwear	Mountain Hardwear Australia	(07) 3114 4311
Wild Country	Rays Outdoors	(03) 5278 7633

John Chapman is the author of a number of walking guides and has been contributing to Wild since issue one. His favourite activities are multiweek trips in Tasmania, although he regularly visits other Australian states.

This survey was refereed by John Wilde



Left to right, the Wilderness Equipment Alpine Express. The Macpac Esprit is designed specifically for women. The Lowe Alpine Contour 60+ can have its volume extended by ten litres.

cloths. Specifications for material weight are also inconsistent, and the only indication of this is in the overall pack weight. Cordura is also commonly used to protect heavy-wear areas of a pack.

Canvas is usually heavier than synthetic materials of similar performance, particularly when it's wet. However, synthetic materials are not as waterproof as canvas.

## Internal compartments

All rucksacks surveyed have either one or two main compartments. Two-compartment packs allow better access to gear, making organisation and packing easier. However, they are usually harder to pack tightly, have more sewing and zip points and are more likely to leak. Single-compartment packs are simpler, more waterproof and less prone to failure while trekking, but the contents are harder to access.



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MOUNTAIN SAFETY RESEARCH

# Macpac's big eVent

And its new Resolution

Kiwi company **Macpac** has re-released its **waterproof jacket** range in eVent after many years of using Gore-Tex. Quoting a US Army survey, Macpac believes eVent to be the most breathable fabric on the market. This is achieved by avoiding the use of the thin PU (polyurethane) coating used on most fabrics, which slows down the transfer of water vapour.

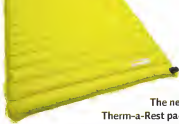


The Macpac Resolution, now in eVent fabric—perfect for heavy sweaters.

Most trampers (to use Kiwi lingo) will be interested in the **Resolution**, which is Macpac's classic mid-thigh-length walking jacket. It comes in both men's and women's sizes (from S-XXL and 8-16, respectively) and has a fully adjustable hood, double storm-flaps with a heat-pressed water channel, two handwarmer pockets, and two chest pockets with water-resistant zips. The jacket weighs 680 grams in the men's large and 580 grams for the women's size 12, and retails for \$549.95. Macpac has also re-released its iconic alpine shell, the **Prophet** (RRP \$599.95), and produced a new lightweight jacket (the men's large weighs only 355 grams) called the **Therm-a-Rest** (RRP \$399.95).

Despite some confusion, Macpac gear is still available Australia-wide, although the company's gear is now sold through its own chain of shops and online. Visit [www.macpac.com.au](http://www.macpac.com.au) for more information.

a multitude of air bladders contained within the mat minimise air movement and thus convective cooling. An aluminised urethane film holds the mat together as well as reflecting heat back to the user, earning the NeoAir a 2.5 R-Value. The mat comes in four sizes: small, medium, regular and large. The regular mat weighs 410 grams and



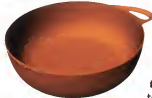
The new NeoAir Therm-a-Rest packs to the same size as a one litre water bottle. Top right, the Gondwana Balfour Smart Shell.

packs down to the size of a one litre water bottle, while inflating to be 6.3 centimetres deep, 183 centimetres long and 51 centimetres wide. It retails for \$259. Contact **Speleon** on (02) 9966 9800 to find out more.

## Knick-Knacks

### Working the wide angles

Lovers of photography and nature landscapes will be wetting themselves over Tamron's latest addition to its digital zoom range, the SP AF 10-24 millimetre F3.5-4.5 Di II. Designed for APS-C digital SLR cameras, this translates to a very wide in-use focal range of 16-37 millimetres, the largest zoom range in its class. Of most excitement for landscape photographers is the minimum focal distance of 24 centimetres, making it ideal for those deep focal-depth nature shots so beloved of Wild Folio photographers. Like all of Tamron's Di II lenses, it is specifically designed to eliminate the 'noise' problems experienced by digital cameras, while the vignetting so common to wide-angled lenses has also been decreased. It weighs 406 grams and retails for \$899; to find out more contact Maxwell International on 1300 882 517.



Clockwise from top right, the Sea to Summit Bucket, the Delta Bowl, and the Sea to Summit Buckle. Tamron's new wide-angled zoom lens.

### Smart shell?

Melbourne company Gondwanaland has come over all clever with its new soft-shell jackets, the Franklin (men's) and Balfour (women's) Smart Shells. The jackets offer all the usual soft-shell features—water-resistant, windproof and breathable fabric—but with the addition of fully-fused seams: that's right, there isn't any stitching to unravel or taped seams to unroll.

Both jackets have attached hoods and three zippered pockets, while the fabric also has a two-way mechanical stretch. The Franklin comes in sizes S-XXXL and the Balfour in sizes 8-16. Both are available in black or red and retail for \$375. Visit [www.gondwanaland.com.au](http://www.gondwanaland.com.au) to find out more.



### Picking the bucket


Sea to Summit has added to its ever-growing collection of useful knick-knacks with the Folding Bucket. Both the ten and 20 litre versions are extremely lightweight and compact, weighing 80 and 110 grams, respectively. Produced from food-grade thermopolyurethane-coated fabric, the buckets have welded seams, a carrying handle and another handle at the base for pouring, and will stand upright on flat ground. The smaller Folding Bucket retails for \$29.95 while the 20 litre version is \$39.95. Contact Sea to Summit on (08) 9221 6617 to find out more.

### Floating on air

Cascade Designs has recently added a new ultra-lightweight sleeping mat to its **Therm-a-Rest** range. The NeoAir is claimed to be the lightest air mat on the market, as well as more stable and up to three times warmer than any other uninsulated air mattress. Designed as a three-season mat, it uses patent-pending 'Triangular Core Matrix' technology, which basically means that while there isn't any insulation,

### In the kitchen

Sea to Summit has also been adding to its cooking range, producing two new tough nylon numbers, the Delta Plate and Bowl. Both are extremely lightweight, the plate weighing 104 grams (960 millilitres) and the bowl 79 grams (800 millilitres). They are both made from food-grade BPA-free nylon, are impervious to stains and odours and won't crack in extreme cold.

They feature a patented Protex hex-pattern base to reduce surface temperature when gripping, along with a useful thumb grip/karabiner loop. The bowl has measurement increments on the inside and retails for \$8.95, while the plate costs \$9.95. 

## From the Billy

### A taste of Africa

#### Annel Battersby shares her recipe for Moroccan Vegetables and Cous-cous

I learnt from others quite early on in my walking years that a few carefully chosen fresh vegetables or ingredients can go a long way towards improving camping meals without adding too much weight to the pack. This recipe, which uses fresh vegetables, was first cooked on the Main Range, near Lake Albina in the Kosciuszko National Park in New South Wales. We camped on a lovely spur quite far from any water source and were glad that we used cous-cous with the vegetables, as you only need a small amount of water. I've also made a version of this recipe on the Larapinta Trail in the Northern Territory at a camp without any water at all; we also added chopped cashews and apricots for extra nutrition.

#### Moroccan Vegetables and Cous-cous

**Feeds:** two to three and requires two cooking pots

**Cooking time:** 30 minutes

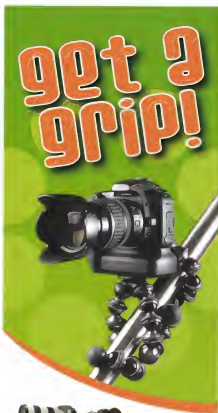
##### Ingredients:

- 1/2 box of cous-cous (you only need to add 1/2 litre or so of boiling water to prepare it) or one packet of flavoured cous-cous
- One zucchini
- One onion
- One or two garlic bulbs
- One capsicum
- One sachet tomato paste or one sachet of flavouring (foil packet, spicy flavour if available)
- Some sultanas and nuts (from your scroggin)
- Some olive oil

Chop vegetables (do it at home beforehand if you can) into small (two to three centimetre) pieces. Fry them in oil in the pot, and cook well, adding water and tomato paste/flavour sachet for the last five to ten minutes of cooking time. Add sultanas and nuts (cashews are best) to the cous-cous, and add boiling water (according to packet directions). Set aside, and as soon as it's done, eat with vegetables.

Wild welcomes readers' contributions to this section; payment is at our standard rate. Send them to the address at the end of this department.

New and innovative products of relevance to the rucksack sports (on loan to Wild) and/or information about them, including high-resolution digital photos (on CD or by email), are welcome for possible review in this department. Written items should be typed, include recommended retail prices and preferably not exceed 200 words. Send them to Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181 or contact us by email: [editorialadmin@wild.com.au](mailto:editorialadmin@wild.com.au)



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Check out the new Gorillapod Focus (pictured) with extra-strong metal construction for larger SLR cameras and lenses.

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## Winter Dreaming DVD

BY STEPHEN CURTAIN (EUCALYPT PRODUCTIONS, 2008, RRP \$49.95, [www.eucalyptproductions.com](http://www.eucalyptproductions.com))

From the first viewing it is clear that *Winter Dreaming: an Australian Alps freeheel film* is an ode to the beauty of the Australian Alps, and not simply a skiing film. While it starts and ends with a series of stunning skiing shots that wouldn't look out of place in a European or North American ski film, in between there are many stunning scenic shots that capture the unique beauty of the Alps. The film also examines a range of individuals who interact with the landscape, which gives it quite a different feel from other strictly skiing films. A very inspiring film.

Ross Taylor

## Dead Lucky

AU LINCOLN HALL (RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA, 2008, RRP \$24.95, [www.randomhouse.com.au](http://www.randomhouse.com.au))

After collapsing from cerebral oedema high on Mt Everest, Lincoln Hall was left for dead. The news of his 'death' spread: climbers were therefore surprised to find Hall very much alive the following day. Not only is his survival incredible, but the story of his rescue is fascinating, with some parts showing the exploitation and lack of empathy involved in climbing Mt Everest today. In *Dead Lucky: Life After Death on Mount Everest*, Hall (an accomplished mountaineer) has clearly accepted being part of a commercial expedition for the sake of getting to the top. From a mountaineering perspective, this means the climb itself lacks interest. One for the armchair mountaineer and lover of survival stories.

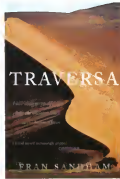
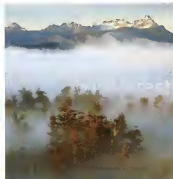
Gemma Woldendorp

## Take a Walk in South-east Queensland (second edition)

BY JOHN & LYN DALY (TAKE A WALK PUBLICATIONS, 2009, \$34.95, [www.takeawalk.com.au](http://www.takeawalk.com.au))

This comprehensively updated version of the 1998 original is a welcome addition to the *Take a Walk* series. Walks described range from Fraser Island in the north to Sundown National Park in the south-west, providing a huge variety of routes for the reader to discover.

The walks are well described, with location maps, distances, grades and, in some instances, route profiles. Additional information on history,



flora and fauna add to the huge amount of information found in this must-have guide.

Gary Tischer

## Wild Forest

EDITED BY ROB BLAKERS (THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY, 2008, \$40, [www.robblakers.com](http://www.robblakers.com))

Mist hangs above towering old-growth forest on the front cover of *Wild Forest*. But don't get comfy yet—after being lulled by the images of awe-inspiring eucalypts in the Weld, Styx and Upper Florentine valleys, on the first page you are warned: 'All of the forests shown in this book lie within forestry coupes. All are zoned for logging, or would be directly affected by logging that is proposed within the next few years.' This is an important book, giving solid reasons for the conservation of these key old-growth areas just outside the protection of World Heritage boundaries. Eight short chapters discuss the environmental importance of old-growth forests, the qualities of each valley, and the activists who relentlessly work for their protection. Unfortunately, it seems as though the publisher did not quite know whether *Wild Forest* was a coffee-table book or a collection of essays, and it suffers as a result. The paperback cover and the large format make reading a little awkward; a shame given the quality of the writing. The photographs (by Rob Blakers, Wolfgang Glowacki and Grant Dixon, among others) capture the stature and grandeur of some of the oldest forests in the world. *Wild Forest* makes you want to book a flight to Hobart, get out your hand-cuffs and head for the trees.

Bron Willis

## This is the Sea 4 DVD

BY JUSTINE CURGENVEN (CACKLE TV PRODUCTIONS, 2008, \$59.95, [www.mactyle.com.au](http://www.mactyle.com.au))

The latest instalment from award-winning filmmaker Justine Curgenvven again showcases some of the world's most outstanding sea kayak destinations. For an Australian audience, the double DVD includes footage of Bass Strait, the Nadgee Wilderness Area of New South Wales and a circumnavigation of New Zealand. The production also include an interesting section on the fast developing niche of kayak fishing, and footage of sea kayakers in action in big water on Canada's Ottawa River (my favourite). Curgenvven has the knack of finding strange and beautiful venues, as well as colourful characters—as with her previous offerings, this is well worth the attention of any serious sea kayaker.

John Wilde

## Down Under the Horizon Line DVD

(SKIPPIY FILMS, 2008, \$40, [www.kayak4play.com.au](http://www.kayak4play.com.au))

If you thought there were only so many silly things you could do with a kayak, think again and watch this movie. It features the exploits of a host of deviant paddlers from Australia (particularly Tasmania) as they paddle their way around Australia and the world. If you are getting bored with paddling and want to expand your horizons, you could try to emulate some of their antics. However, if you are a sane and safe white-water paddler, you will watch in awe and mention it to your mates for a laugh.

JW

## Traversa

BY FRAN SANDHAM (DUCKWORTH OVERLOOK, 2008, \$27.95, [www.towerbooks.com.au](http://www.towerbooks.com.au))

Equal parts history, travelogue and pure masochism, *Traversa* describes a gruelling 5000 kilometre solo trek across southern Africa. Ex-Rough Guide editor Sandham discovers a unique view of Africa, its people, and its early explorers as he walks unassisted from Namibia's Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean. Understated, the book is spiced with the author's self-deprecating humour and dry wit, as his early naivety is replaced by sheer bloody-mindedness, superhuman stamina and extraordinary penny-pinching. A great read.

Steve Waters

## Bogong Alpine Area 1:50 000

(SPATIAL VISION, 2009, \$11.95, [www.svmaps.com.au](http://www.svmaps.com.au))

In recent years fires have altered large swathes of Victoria's High Country. This new offering from Spatial Vision is a timely replacement for the classic Vicmap version. Slightly larger than its predecessor (it covers Bright to Anglers Rest), this GDA94 full-colour sheet features clearer graphics, track distances, GPS coordinates for huts, updated walk descriptions and many new (and some renamed) features. The magnetic-north declination appears to be wrong and the 1:25 000 index is missing. Still, it's great value for the price. (Although personally I'd place the legend over Demon Ridge Track!) ●

SW

Publications for possible review are welcome. Send them, with RRP and a digital image of the cover for reproduction, to Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, VIC 3181.



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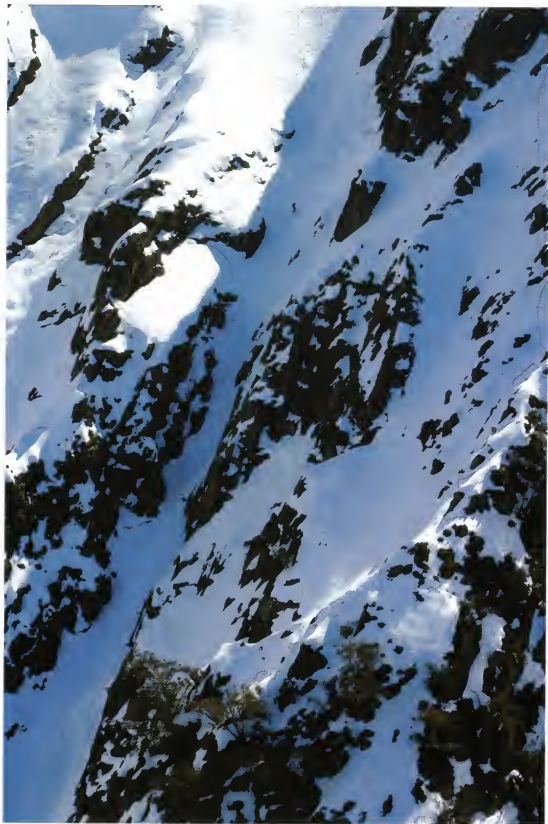
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